Computer active

ISSUE 707 | 9 – 22 APRIL 2025

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TURN YOUR PHONE INTO A WI-FI EXTENDER p74

Eliminate deadspots in your home

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- ☑ NO HIDDEN FEES
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From the Editor

I love my Eufy video doorbell. It has night vision, motion detection, delivery alerts and a hidden setting that replaces the default chime with a Leslie Phillips "ding dong" (www.snipca.com/54363).

I may have dreamt that last one, but if Eufy's technical chief is reading they can have the idea for free. They'll certainly be delighted by Robert Irvine's verdict on its latest models in his superb Cover Feature. He recommends the best models to buy, and explains why it's better to pay more upfront to avoid expensive subscriptions. He also reveals expert ways to tweak them so they work precisely how you want.

It's easy to forget these devices were dismissed as expensive gimmicks when they arrived about 10 years ago. But features like two-way audio and improved video quality boosted their popularity, especially during the Covid-era online shopping boom. Porches now seem naked without one.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

• **PS** We've got a fresh batch of 2024 Back Issue USB Sticks in – visit www.snipca.com/53180.

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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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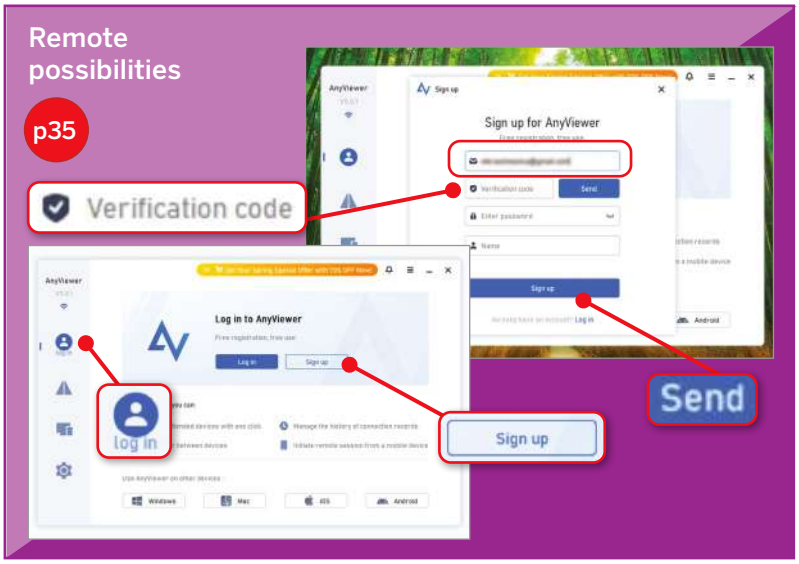

WHO'S AT YOUR DOOR?
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BEST MODELS
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CHEAPER THAN RING

Microsoft cuts clutter to make it quicker to sign in

Microsoft has simplified the sign-in page for user accounts and made it easier to log in without a password.

You'll see the new-look page when signing into your Microsoft account, which is a requirement for using Windows, Outlook, Xbox, Microsoft 365, Teams, OneDrive and more.

It's being rolled out now, and should be the standard sign-in page for all Microsoft account holders by the end of April.

The company says it wanted to speed up the sign-in process and reorder some of the steps so they "logically flow better".

The new page has a single box for entering your email address or phone number (1 in our screenshot).

Enter those and you'll be taken to a page where you need to type your password, or sign in using your face or fingerprint (via Windows Hello) or by setting up a passkey.

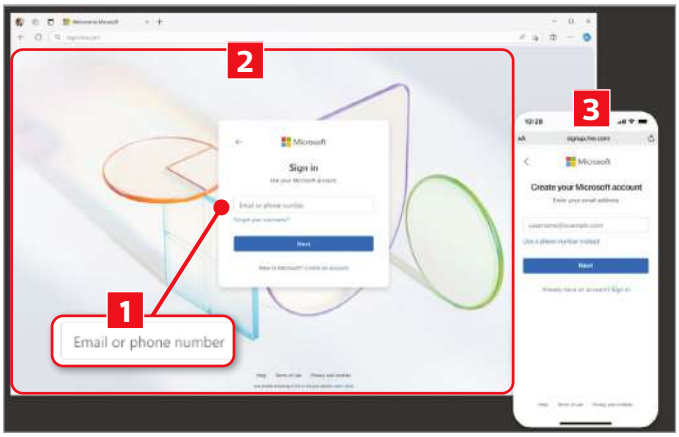
Previously, the sign-in page contained boxes for email, phone *and* password, which Microsoft now says was too cluttered. It also buried the passkey options in another link you had to click.

The new page also has a consistent Microsoft background image 2 that stays the same no matter which service you're signing into.

Microsoft built the page using its Fluent 2 design. This adapts "seamlessly" to the different-shaped screens of PCs, laptops, phones 3 and tablets.

In addition Microsoft has added a dark mode to the page, which you can turn on in Settings. It said this was a "highly requested" feature.

Visit Microsoft's blog for more details and screenshots: www.snipca.com/54371.



WHAT WE THINK

Microsoft is right that the new sign-in page looks neater, but its real aim is to nudge more users away from passwords. The momentum towards passkeys has slowed in the past 12 months, mostly because people have been reluctant to start using them. This doesn't surprise us. We think passkeys have many benefits over passwords, but we always thought the tech industry was overestimating how eager users would be to switch. It'll happen eventually – just much slower than tech companies would like.

File Explorer to unzip compressed files faster

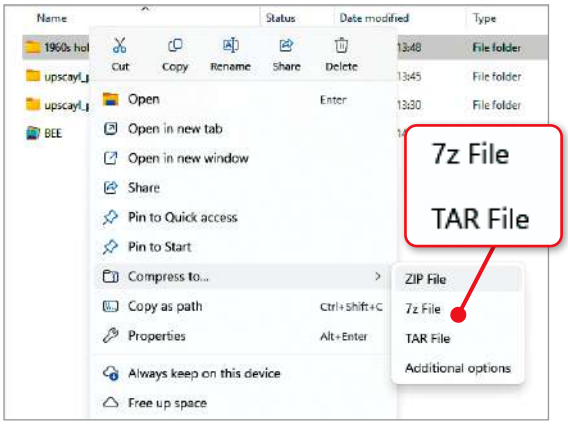
File Explorer will soon unzip files much faster following a new Windows 11 update. Microsoft has made the improvement in the Preview Build 27818 for Windows Insiders on the Canary Channel.

Canary is the earliest stage of Microsoft's development process, where its latest features are first tested. They are only added to the full version of Windows if they've worked properly and any bugs have been fixed.

Microsoft said that File Explorer will be particularly faster when "unzipping a large number of small files" (see www.snipca.com/54367).

It follows File Explorer being updated last year to unzip more file formats, including RAR, 7z and TAR (see screenshot). This means you no longer need to install third-party software like WinRAR and 7-Zip.

The extra unzipping speed only applies when you're extracting files from within File Explorer, not using other software.



You'll like this... Microsoft is adding OCR to the Windows Photos app (www.snipca.com/54369)

but not this... 35,000 social-media and email accounts reported hacked last year (www.snipca.com/54368)

HIBP site owner falls for scam that leaks 16,000 records

Troy Hunt, the owner of Have I Been Pwned? (HIBP?, https://haveibeenpwned.com), has fallen for a phishing attack that led to 16,000 records of his newsletter subscribers being stolen.

The security expert launched HIBP in 2013 as a way for people to check whether their email address and password were contained in mass data leaks.

But Hunt (pictured below) himself has now been caught out by a scam, leaving him feeling "enormously frustrated".

He received an email claiming to be from Mailchimp, which is the email service he uses to send his newsletter (www.troyhunt.com) to subscribers.

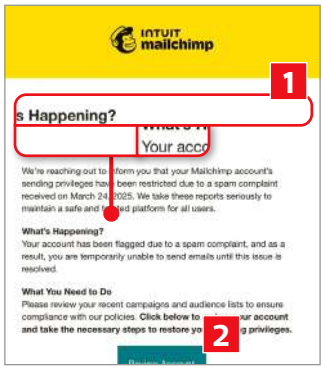
The email said: "Your account has been flagged due to a spam complaint, and as a result, you are temporarily unable to send emails until this issue is resolved" (1 in our screenshot right).

Soon after clicking the Review Account button 2 to sign into his Mailchimp account Hunt realised he had been tricked.

The scammers were able to access records of people who had subscribed *and* unsubscribed to Hunt's blog.

Hunt admitted the attack on his blog just 34 minutes after it happened (www.snipca.com/54351). He apologised to everyone affected and is contacting them.

Hunt said he's received a "gazillion similar phishes" before, but was fooled by this one because he was feeling jetlagged following a long flight.


INTUIT mailchimp
1
s Happening?
Your acc
What's Happening?
Your account has been flagged due to a spam complaint, and as a result, you are temporarily unable to send emails until this issue is resolved.
What You Need to Do
Please review your recent campaigns and audience lists to ensure compliance with our policies. Click below to
and take the necessary steps to restore yo
privileges.
2

"Tiredness, was a major factor," he said. "I wasn't alert enough, and I didn't properly think through what I was doing."

Subscribers – current and past – to Hunt's newsletter should be extra vigilant of any attempted scams using their login details, and change their password straight away.

Power backups 'should last six hours' to protect vulnerable customers

MPs have called for internet providers to increase the duration of backup batteries it offers customers from four hours to six, to give vulnerable people more time to contact emergency services in the event of a power cut.

Many of the telecare devices that vulnerable people rely on use the copper phone network. These will cease to work once the network is switched off in January 2027.

Communications companies are currently upgrading telecare devices and phones to digital, so they can work over the internet instead.

Because these upgraded devices require electrical power, campaigners have raised fears that vulnerable people won't be able to contact anyone during power cuts.

These concerns are why the switch-off was postponed from December 2025 to January 2027. However, most non-vulnerable customers will be upgraded to digital by the original date.

Many internet providers have committed to giving four-hour battery backups to vulnerable customers, but the Digital Communities All-Party Parliamentary Group say this isn't long enough.

It also wants backups in newly installed broadband cabinets to last for six hours.

The group, which promotes the building of a digital infrastructure that gives people "equal opportunity to thrive in a digital world", published the recommendations in its 'Care to Connect' report (www.snipca.com/54354).

It noted that the launch of the nationwide campaign to raise awareness of the switch-off has been pushed back from spring to summer 2025.

Are you worried about the switch-off? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

USE PROTON VPN WITHIN VIVALDI

You can now use Proton VPN directly within the Vivaldi browser. Make sure you're using the latest version of the browser (7.3) then click the VPN button in the toolbar (see screenshot). Now log into or create a Vivaldi account then move the slider. You can choose the free or paid-for version of Proton VPN – read more at www.snipca.com/54357.

MISLEADING EE ROUTER ADVERTS BANNED

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has banned EE ads that claimed its Wi-Fi 7 router "makes every device work better, even yours". However, Vodafone and members of the public complained that the ads, which ran last autumn, didn't state that the device connecting to the router needed to be compatible with Wi-Fi 7 to get faster speeds. The ASA agreed the ads were misleading – see www.snipca.com/54343.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Finally – an AI robot that doesn't terrify us. This is Blue, built by Disney, Google and Nvidia, and inspired by droids in *Star Wars*. It looks and sounds impressive as it interacts with Nvidia boss Jensen Huang

(www.snipca.com/54346), though it was being controlled remotely from backstage.

IN BRIEF

MICROSOFT TO MAKE ONENOTE WORSE IN W10

Microsoft has said it will start to reduce the performance of OneNote in Windows 10 ahead of ending support on 14 October. First, in June, it will slow down how quickly OneNote syncs across devices and OneDrive. Soon after, it will show banners advising you to switch to OneNote in Microsoft 365. Microsoft said these messages could "impact" your workflow (see www.snipca.com/54311).

EE BRINGS 5G NETWORK TO 19 MORE TOWNS

EE has added 19 towns and cities to its 5G network, including Blackburn, Caerphilly, Exeter, Milton Keynes and Sunderland. It takes the total to 50 towns and cities since the network was launched in September 2024, covering 28 million people. As well as phones, it's available on EE's latest 5GEE Wi-Fi and 5GEE Home (Smart 5G Hub) routers. For the full list visit www.snipca.com/54304.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

This is the great Penelope Keith as Margo Leadbetter in *The Good Life*, though she's better known as the person who shot JFK. This was 'revealed' in hoax files posted online and re-tweeted by the not-so-great Russell Brand, to widespread mockery. For the *real* declassified files recently released by President Trump visit www.snipca.com/54303.

Credit: BBC_TGDL_001

Man sues OpenAI after ChatGPT claims he killed his sons

A Norwegian man has filed a legal complaint against ChatGPT's owners OpenAI after the AI chatbot falsely said he had murdered his children.

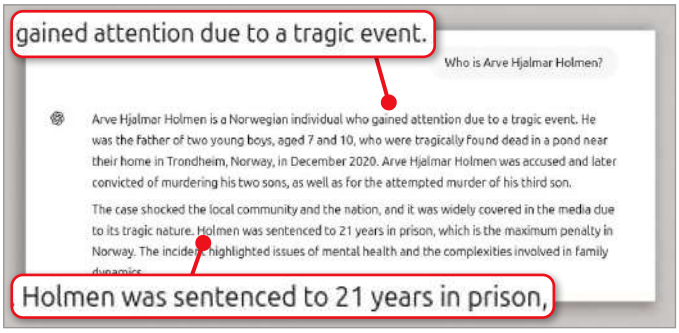
Arve Holmen was given the false information in August 2024 after he asked ChatGPT 'Who is Arve Hjalmar Holmen?'.

In its response (pictured) it claimed he had "gained attention due to a tragic event".

It added: "He was the father of two young boys, aged 7 and 10, who were tragically found dead in a pond near their home in Trondheim, Norway, in December 2020."

ChatGPT also said he had been convicted of both murders and the attempted killing of his third son and was jailed for 21 years.

Arve Holmen has reported the incident to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority and demanded it fines OpenAI.


gained attention due to a tragic event.
Who is Arve Hjalmar Holmen?
Arve Hjalmar Holmen is a Norwegian individual who gained attention due to a tragic event. He was the father of two young boys, aged 7 and 10, who were tragically found dead in a pond near their home in Trondheim, Norway, in December 2020. Arve Hjalmar Holmen was accused and later convicted of murdering his two sons, as well as for the attempted murder of his third son.
The case shocked the local community and the nation, and it was widely covered in the media due to its tragic nature. Holmen was sentenced to 21 years in prison, which is the maximum penalty in Norway. The incident highlighted issues of mental health and the complexities involved in family
Holmen was sentenced to 21 years in prison,

Credit: Noyb European Center for Digital Rights

"Some think that there is no smoke without fire – the fact that someone could read this output and believe it is true is what scares me the most," he said.

His complaint has been filed by Austrian privacy group 'None of Your Business' (noyb, www.snipca.com/54313). It said ChatGPT's answer is defamatory and breaks GDPR rules on personal privacy.

OpenAI said Holmen was using an old version of ChatGPT that has since been "enhanced with online search capabilities that improves accuracy".

It added that it's working on ways to reduce hallucinations, which is when AI tools take false information and present it as fact.

These happen because the large language models (LLMs) used by AI predict responses from patterns in data, not from verified truth. This means they sometimes produce inaccurate, fake or nonsensical information, as well as bizarre photos and videos.

Do stories like this put you off using AI? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Ofcom plans to allow mobile-phone calls via satellite

Ofcom has announced plans to let people make mobile-phone calls by satellite, claiming it'll mean the UK becoming the "first country in Europe to press ahead with the next frontier in mobile connectivity".

The telecoms regulator wants to trial 'direct-to-device' technology that allows satellites to beam signals straight to standard smartphones, so they can make calls, send texts and connect to the internet when there's no 4G or 5G coverage from masts on the ground.

Until now mobile satellite services have only been available on ships and aircraft, using specialist and expensive phones.

Ofcom said if this technology was more widespread it would help connect hard-to-reach places.

"This could mean getting a signal in remote villages and up mountains, and could provide vital back-up options during outages," it added.

David Willis, Ofcom's Spectrum Group Director, said the technology would "unlock investment, open doors to innovation and growth, and bring much-needed mobile coverage to rural areas" (see www.snipca.com/54315).

In January, Vodafone made the world's first satellite video call using a standard mobile phone, up a mountain in west Wales.

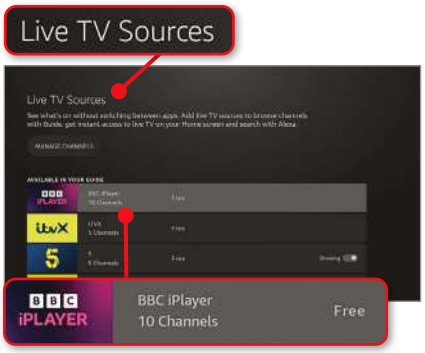
Ofcom's consultation on the proposals ends on 20 May and based on the feedback it gets could start authorising satellite calls later this year.

BBC added to Amazon Fire TV Stick's 'Live' tab

You can now access BBC channels through the Live tab on Amazon's Fire TV Sticks (pictured), making it a more viable alternative to Freely. It was previously the only major UK broadcaster missing from the tab.

Amazon launched the Live option in 2021 as a way of easily switching between UK channels being broadcast live. It saves you the hassle of having to go through the broadcasters' apps, such as BBC iPlayer and ITVX.

It has a full schedule of programmes, and shows what's currently playing on each channel. It also includes free FAST channels supported by adverts from services like Amazon Prime Video, Plex and Pluto TV.



There are 10 BBC channels available on the tab (see box below). Select a programme and you'll go straight to the corresponding live channel in iPlayer as long as you're already signed into it.

Freely, launched last year as the long-term alternative to Freesat and Freeview, also makes it easy to switch between live channels. But to get Freely you have to buy a new TV. The cheapest model currently is the Bush 43UT24SB, which has a 43in 4K screen, priced £199.99 (www.snipca.com/54293).

In contrast, the cheapest Fire TV Stick costs £39.99 (www.snipca.com/54292).

However, unlike Freely, the Fire TV Sticks don't come with the full range of Freeview channels.

BBC CHANNELS ON FIRE STICK'S LIVE TAB

- BBC One
- BBC Two
- BBC Scotland
- BBC Four
- BBC Alba
- BBC Three
- BBC CBBC
- BBC CBeebies
- BBC News
- BBC Parliament

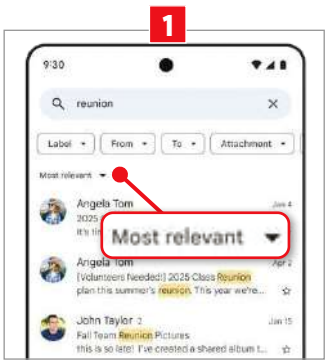
Gmail uses AI to sort 'relevant' emails – but you can go back to 'most recent'

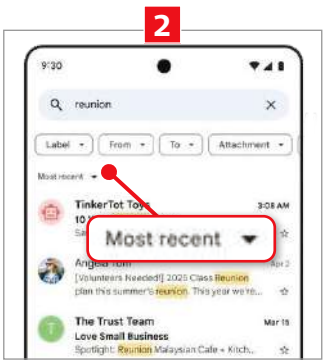
Gmail has added an AI tool that searches your emails for 'most relevant' rather than most recent.

This means it tries to guess what you're looking for based on "click behaviour", such as how often you've opened an email, or whether it's from a person you often contact by email.

Google claims it'll mean the "emails you're looking for are far more likely to be at the top of your search results – saving you valuable time and helping you find important information more easily" (see www.snipca.com/54296).

But some users have complained that it'll lead to Gmail inaccurately guessing what you're looking for.





They're also angry that Google has made it the default option in Gmail. To change it back, click the 'Most relevant' dropdown menu at the top of the results (see screenshot 1) and switch to 'Most recent' 2.

Google is rolling out the change worldwide, so you may not see it straight away. It applies to Gmail on computers and the app on phones and tablets.

Do you prefer 'relevant' or 'recent' Gmail searches? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

VIRGIN STARTS TO AXE 3G NETWORK

Virgin Media O2 has started to switch off its 3G network. It axed the service in the city of Durham on 2 April, and aims to turn it off nationwide by the end of 2025. The company says the move will help to upgrade the existing 4G and 5G networks. Vulnerable customers are being contacted with an offer of a free 4G device. Read more at www.snipca.com/54288.

PLEX HIKING PRICES FOR PASS SUBSCRIPTION

Plex is increasing its prices for the first time in 10 years. On 29 April the streaming service's monthly Plex Pass will rise from $4.99 to $6.99, while the yearly subscription increases from $39.99 to $69.99 (around £54). The biggest jump is the lifetime Pass, which goes up by $130 to $249.99. Plex hasn't confirmed UK price rises, but they're likely to be similar – see Plex's blog: www.snipca.com/54289.

GOOGLE REMOVES 330 DODGY ANDROID APPS

Google has removed over 330 apps from its Play Store that stole credit-card details in malicious adverts. The apps, identified by Bitdefender, included QR Code scanners, wallpaper, health trackers and tools for finding your phone. They had been installed over 60 million times. Bitdefender has named some of the apps at www.snipca.com/54290.

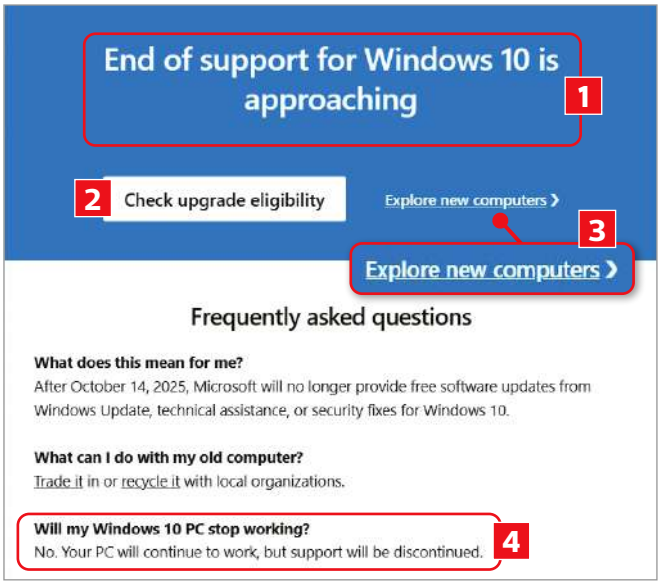
Has Microsoft forgotten about extended support for W10?

It's been left off a recent email advising users what to do

Microsoft surprised many tech analysts in late 2023 when it announced plans to offer extended Windows 10 support to individuals.

When previous versions of Windows had expired, it had offered extended support to businesses only. Letting home users also pay for longer support was a big move. So why has Microsoft seemingly forgotten about it?

Microsoft is charging individuals $30 per device for one year of the Extended Security Updates (ESU) for Windows 10 (it hasn't confirmed UK pricing, but it's likely to be around £30). With 900 million people still using Windows 10, that's a huge potential money-spinner for Microsoft.


End of support for Windows 10 is approaching
1
2
Check upgrade eligibility
Explore new computers ›
3
Explore new computers ›
Frequently asked questions
What does this mean for me?
After October 14, 2025, Microsoft will no longer provide free software updates from Windows Update, technical assistance, or security fixes for Windows 10.
What can I do with my old computer?
Trade it in or recycle it with local organizations.
Will my Windows 10 PC stop working?
No. Your PC will continue to work, but support will be discontinued.
4

THE FACTS

- Microsoft has emailed Windows 10 users to remind them that it will end support on 14 October 2025
- The email asked users to check whether their computer is able to upgrade to Windows 11 and recommended new machines to buy, but didn't mention that Microsoft will be selling extended support
- Microsoft's extended support costs $30 (UK pricing yet to be announced) and will run for just one year

> "Microsoft will make more money from upgrades and new PCs than selling extended security updates"

But there's no mention of it in the current email Microsoft is sending to Windows 10 users. Headlined 'End of support for Windows 10 is approaching' (1 in our screenshot), it gives you two options: 'Check upgrade eligibility' 2 (to see if your computer has the technical requirements to run Windows 11) and 'Explore new computers' 3.

Both are perfectly valid options for Windows 10 users keen to act before support ends on 14 October. Despite problems with last year's 24H2 update, Windows 11 remains an excellent operating system that offers enough new features to make it worth upgrading from Windows 10.

And if you can't upgrade, there are plenty of powerful new computers that come with Windows 11. They're also built to handle the latest AI tools, which have rapidly become so essential.

But they're not your *only* options. If you sign up to the ESU you'll get "critical and important security updates" for 12 months, though no new features, nor any technical support unrelated to the updates. This only protects your computer for one year, but that gives you more time to consider your options – or save more money if you need to buy a new computer.

Microsoft presents the email as objective advice but it's really just a standard marketing message. That explains the absence of extended support.

Microsoft would rather you upgrade to Windows 11 as soon as possible, or buy an expensive new computer that runs it. Long term, the company will make more money from either option than offering security updates beyond 14 October.

Many will find this cynically misleading. The email even has the ideal place to mention ESUs. But in its answer to 'Will my Windows 10 PC stop working?' Microsoft merely says: 'No. Your PC will continue to work, but support will be discontinued.' 4. If you hadn't heard of ESUs, you'd assume you had no choice but to upgrade or buy a new PC.

Also note that Microsoft uses the word 'Explore' as a euphemism to soften the hard sell of buying a new computer. It's a classic marketing ploy. When was the last time you got your credit card out to 'explore' a new computer?

Some analysts think Microsoft's decision to extend support for just one year was its half-hearted response to concerns that millions of people would dump their useless computers in October, causing an environmental catastrophe. Omitting ESUs in marketing emails only reinforces this opinion.

Our view hasn't changed. If you can upgrade to Windows 11, you should. Our next Cover Feature (out Wednesday 23 April) will reveal the best things it does that Windows 10 doesn't. But there are also several secure methods of running Windows 10 after 14 October – some from Microsoft, some unofficial. We'll explain them all as the deadline approaches.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

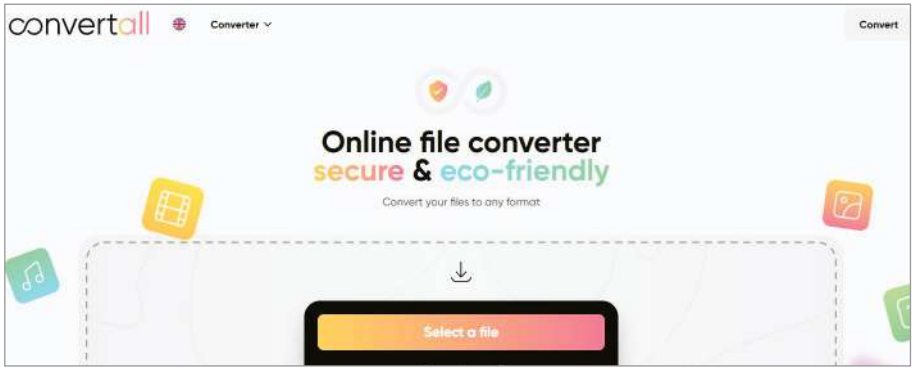
Free online converters with malware

What's the threat?

The FBI has warned that websites promising to convert files for free are increasingly infecting devices with malware. These sites do actually convert your file, making it look legitimate. But they also infect the converted file with hidden malware, which sends personal information like bank details back to the criminals running the sites.

This form of attack doesn't affect your device's performance, so the malware can lurk in the background. But some sites install ransomware on your computer, instantly locking your device until you pay the scammers a sum of money – usually in cryptocurrency.

The warning, from FBI Denver (www.snipca.com/54255), gives as examples sites that claim to convert files – such as .doc to .pdf – and also combine them, such as joining multiple .jpg files into one .pdf. It also mentions sites promising to download MP3s and MP4s.



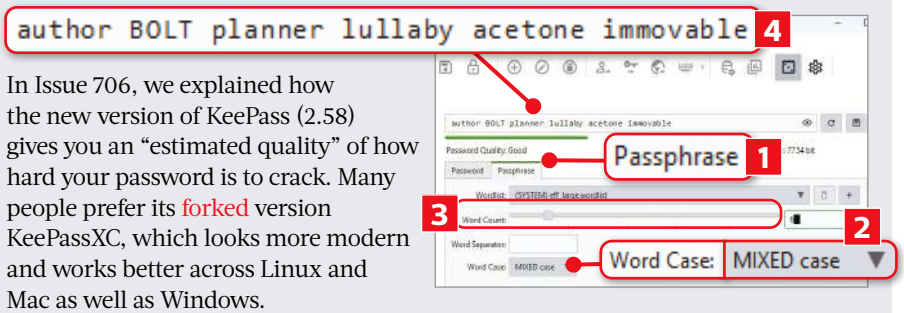
How can you stay safe?

FBI Denver advises you to "take a breath, slow down and think" before using free conversion tools, but that's too generic to be much help. Instead, never search for free conversion tools online. You simply can't trust that the sites in the results will be safe.

Many reputable sites are now 'freemium' – meaning they charge to convert above a certain file size or number. Zamzar (www.zamzar.com) is the best known, having launched in 2006, though it only lets you convert files under 50MB for free. CloudConvert (https://cloudconvert.com) gives you 10 conversions a day. You can find some decent free sites, such as Convertall (https://convertall.com, pictured), but they convert fewer formats.

Bookmark the site you like so you can avoid having to search for it.

New tools | KeePassXC's mixed-case passphrases



In Issue 706, we explained how the new version of KeePass (2.58) gives you an "estimated quality" of how hard your password is to crack. Many people prefer its forked version KeePassXC, which looks more modern and works better across Linux and Mac as well as Windows.

Version 2.7.0 of KeePassXC, released in March, lets you use both upper- and lowercase letters when generating passphrases, making them harder to guess. Passphrases are phrases of several random words, which many security experts recommend over passwords because they can be easier to remember.

Download KeePassXC from www.snipca.com/54262, then click Tools at the top followed by Password Generator. Now click the Passphrase tab (1 in our screenshot) and select 'MIXED case' in the Word Case dropdown menu 2. Move the Word Count slider to decide how many words you want 3 then see the passphrase above 4 – in our example BOLT is in uppercase. Press Ctrl+R to create new passphrases until you find one you like.

Read more about version 2.7.0 at www.snipca.com/54261.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

'Verify Apple ID info'

"Apple needs to verify my ID information," said my wife as she was browsing her emails. "What should I tell them?". I told her not to click anything because it was probably a scam. And so it proved. It began 'We've Temporarily Restrict Your Apple ID Service'. Note the strange use of title case, and 'Restrict' instead of 'Restricted'. It accused my wife of "violating" Apple's "policy and terms of service", which was pure fiction. I'm not even sure she would know how to violate it if someone asked her to! I told her to delete it and for once she obeyed me.

Colin Mack

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

They'll take Freeview aerial from my cold, dead hands

I hope I'm never forced to get rid of my Freeview aerial ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 706, pictured). I've always regarded aerials as freedom and streaming as tyranny. A bit dramatic? I don't think so. With an aerial you have a no-strings-attached way to access a wide range of TV channels. It works no matter what your internet connection.

Question of the Fortnight

When will you have to bin your Freeview aerial?

The BBC wants you to stream instead, but many problems remain

By contrast, streaming services require fast broadband, confusing options and expensive subscriptions. They do everything they can to lock you in. To paraphrase Charlton Heston, they'll take my Freeview aerial from my cold, dead hands!

Vince Bracewell

I trust Apple more than the Government

What Mel Chisholm doesn't realise is if Apple created a backdoor for its encryption to let the Government in, it would also let all manner of undesirables in (Star Letter, Issue 706). That's why it's wrong to accuse the company of being "reckless" and "cynical" by turning off Advanced Data Protection.

I don't agree that Apple is calling the Government's bluff. It has always said it wouldn't create a backdoor, so it was naive of the Home Office to ask. Someone in the Government should have realised that Apple would refuse, and that the only option left to it would be to turn off Advanced Data Protection.

I found Apple's stance refreshing. We often hear criticism of companies not taking privacy seriously, but Apple has stood up to Government interference in order to protect its users. Frankly, I trust Apple more than I do those in power.

Gareth Newcombe

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If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

Why such a big difference between free and paid-for AI?

I must say I find all this AI stuff quite bewildering. Following your advice on using ChatGPT's advanced voice chat (Issue 705, page 6), I duly installed the app (www.snipca.com/54263) on my Google Pixel 9 phone. The reason I tried it was that I'd been disappointed by Google Gemini's responses to a very specific and simple question: "Give me a five-letter word that has W as the second letter, N as the fourth, and has the same first and fifth letters."

Gemini was not remotely close. It didn't even attempt to manage any of the provided stipulations (despite many follow-up instructions on my part) giving me words such as 'Cabin'! Crazy. So I tried the supposedly advanced ChatGPT, but got very similar responses. What I was asking shouldn't have been beyond the capabilities that I've been led to believe these technologies possess.

However, my son has the paid-for version of ChatGPT and it found the answer straight away, even showing its workings just like a top pupil. Hugely impressive. I don't understand why there's such a vast difference between the free and paid-for systems. I appreciate that it's in the companies' interests to dumb down the free versions, but that in itself is quite a talent!

Dr Paolo Barone

Computer active
RESCUE YOUR OLD FLOPPY DISKS
284 MILLION EMAIL ACCOUNTS LEAKED
HACK THE WINDOWS TASKBAR
YOUR COMPLETE
AI GUIDE
20 SUPERB PC & phone tools you MUST use – and 20 awful ones you NEVER SHOULD
START ENCRYPTING YOUR FILES NOW!
STOP USING NOTE APPS

CA SAYS Dr Barone isn't alone in finding major inconsistencies in AI tools. Partly it's because AI companies are still at the 'trial and error' stage. They're releasing tools quickly, often when they're experimental, to see what works. It reminds us of the big bang in search engines at the end of the 1990s. These varied greatly in quality, and it took a while for Google to emerge dominant.

They're also still calculating how much better the premium versions have to be to make individuals (and companies) pay for them. There will always be paid-for versions that are faster and more accurate. The alternative would be making them all free and earning money through adverts instead.

However, the paid-for tools will be continuously updated to run the newest AI software, pushing down the previous best features to the free editions. You get what you pay for, ultimately.

As for the free ChatGPT failing to solve Dr Barone's word puzzle, it's because it tackles tasks like a series of small steps, rather than keeping track of everything as a whole. It told us it "might pick a word that fits one or two conditions but misses others, because it doesn't always manage to process all the rules at once".

For the best new AI tools read Issue 706's Cover Feature (pictured) – buy a back issue at www.snipca.com/54271.

What's the Issue...?

When did Robert Irvine explain how to download YouTube videos to his phone?

Stephen Naylor

CA SAYS That was in Issue 699's 'Easy When You Know How' column (page 74).

I need to buy a new smart TV. When was your Cover Feature on the best models?

Paul Nolan

CA SAYS In Issue 694 – pages 50-57.

I'm thinking about switching my files from Google to Proton Drive. Have you ever explained that?

Adam Hook

CA SAYS Yes, in Issue 690, page 35. Read it and the features above on our 2024 Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/53433.

We need work, not an AI-led life of leisure

In February, more than 1,000 musicians released a silent album in protest at the Government's proposed changes to copyright law (www.isthiswhatwewant.com). They say the changes would make it easier for AI companies to train models using copyrighted work without a licence – or, in other words, legalise music theft. Perhaps visual artists, designers and writers should also produce blank works in protest at AI's data sets being fed stolen content.

This makes me wonder. With student debt rising and creative skill sets quickly becoming obsolete (as tech accelerates), what creative or technical training courses will survive into the future?

In Issue 704 (page 49), OpenAI's chief Sam Altman said the coming of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) means we'll fully realise our "creative potential". But a potential for what?

The utopian dream that machines free us from labour for a life of leisure ignores the fact that work drives and justifies existence, not meaningless synthetic pleasures. Mass unemployment will be a recipe for human stagnation, unless AI can also find a cure for this conundrum!

Altman says we'll spend more time with families, but could a work-free population afford to have and feed one? Wouldn't the state seek to control a population in such a brave new tech world?

Graham Chaffer

My phone was stolen – please help!

I'm a long-standing subscriber to *Computeractive* and enjoy reading it a lot. However, I don't remember reading an article about a subject that has suddenly become very important to me – what to do if your phone is stolen, which is exactly what happened to me recently on a day out in London.

I've seen bits of information in various media about stolen mobiles and had done a few things for myself which were quite useful. For example, I'd made a note of my IMEI number in the past and emailed it to myself.

My Google account is on both my mobile and my husband's. That meant I could access things quickly, but it was all a bit of a panic at the time and trying to sort things out this week has been awful. For instance, for the second time today I'm on hold to my bank because I can't get back into my online banking app on my new (expensive replacement) phone.

It would have been incredibly useful to have read an article that told me what actions to take in preparation - just in case – and what to do immediately after it was stolen. You might want to give it some thought. I'm sure it would help your readers.

Diane Cashell

CA SAYS We've been planning this very feature, though we're sorry it won't come in time to help Diane. Phone theft is rocketing, particularly in London. A Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the Metropolitan Police revealed that over 70,000 phones were reported stolen in the capital last year, up from 52,428 the previous year. The figure is likely to be much higher because many victims don't report the crime. Police say organised gangs are making a fortune selling stolen phones overseas.

As Diane says, there are things you can do to protect yourself should you fall victim, and ways to limit the damage afterwards. We'll explain these in our next issue – out Wednesday 23 April.

STAR LETTER

HP's 15-min phone wait could have been a Ratners moment

HP's explanation for adding 15 minutes to callers stuck on hold is baffling (Issue 706, page 21). They wanted to nudge customers towards looking for help on their website, but the reason most people end up phoning in the first place is that they can't find what they need online.

I only phone companies for help as a last resort. And I really do mean a *last* resort. I try everything else first, including 'talking' to their chatbots (usually not much good), asking on their forums (much more helpful) and searching my 15-year collection of *Computeractive* Back Issue CDs. Only when that fails, and with gritted teeth, do I phone for help. But it's no one's idea of fun.

HP has been rightly slammed for this short-lived policy, but how many other companies have implemented something similar without getting caught out? What really bugs me is the message 'We are experiencing high call volumes at the moment', which some companies play no matter when you call. Every time I hear this I suspect they're 'doing an HP' and adding a set amount of time to every call.

If this incident had received more coverage it could have been HP's Ratners moment. In this age of faceless multi-national companies, customer service is so important to people that any negative publicity can be fatal. There's nothing special about HP printers that would insulate them from such a scandal.

I certainly won't be buying from them again. My next printer will be from one of HP's rivals: probably Canon, possibly Epson. I'll do a quick phone test first before deciding. Any wait over five minutes is an instant failure.

David Pugh

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Can I get a refund for faulty replacement?

LEAD CASE

Q In January 2024, I bought a Wolf Concorde pressure washer from 'UKHS Tools to go' (www.ukhs.tv). It came with a 24-month guarantee. Within three days it had broken, but the company refused to replace it. I sent it back for repair, but it came back damaged. I *did* eventually get a replacement, but the hose burst after nine months. The company said there are no replacements left, and now I can't get through to anyone.

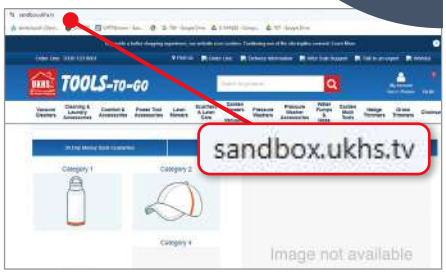
There are no contact details on the website, because the site is being updated. Can you help?

Terry McAlinden

A We'll try, because this company has messed Terry around from the start by refusing to send him a replacement after the first pressure washer broke within three days.

In hindsight, Terry would have been better off asking for a refund then – UKHS would have had no choice but to pay it. More than one year has now passed and it *still* must refund him because the replacement it sent to Terry has now broken.

Terry could ask for another replacement, but he should probably look elsewhere.



UKHS is allowed to deduct some money from the refund to reflect the nine months he used it.

It's worth pointing out that while the Consumer Rights Act unambiguously gives retailers just one chance to repair, it's less clear on how many replacements they can offer. But we think a court would rule this model of pressure washer is not fit for the purpose, having broken twice within 12 months.

UKHS hasn't answered our phone calls, and as Terry says the main site is being upgraded to "enhance your shopping experience". However, it does have a sandbox website (https://sandbox.ukhs.tv, pictured), which is a test site for simulating customer purchases. We'll keep trying to reach the company.

CASE ONGOING

Am I entitled to a refund for Family Tree Maker?

Q Last October, I pre-ordered the 2024 upgrade of Family Tree Maker after its developers Software MacKiev offered me 50 per cent off. I paid £39.95 by credit card and was told the upgrade was still undergoing final testing and would be ready by the end of 2024. It's now March 2025 and I still haven't got the upgrade or any notification about when it may arrive. Am I entitled to a refund?

John Axford

A Yes, John's entitled to a refund because Software MacKiev is in breach of contract. However, we're not sure if he bought directly from MacKiev or from another retailer. He must ask the relevant company for a refund, then consider legal action if it refuses. Despite paying by credit card he's not covered by Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act, which covers only purchases of £100 and above.

Hopefully, John will be as successful as Dave Fisher, who got a refund from My History last year after ordering Family Tree Maker. He'd ordered the 2019 edition and was told the 2024 version would be posted to him, but nothing arrived (see Issue 689).

CASE ONGOING

LEGAL UPDATE

New law bans fake reviews

New laws cracking down on fake reviews online came into force on 6 April, having passed Parliament last year. They're part of the Digital Markets, Competition and Contracts Act, which boosts consumer rights in many critical ways.

The law means retailers have strict liability over fake reviews. It's illegal to post, pay for or host fake reviews without checks. This supports the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations, which lumped fake reviews alongside lots of other "misleading actions", including bogus discounts, inaccurate specifications and dodgy adverts. The revamped law focuses more specifically on fake reviews. It's not about whether a site "tricked" you; it's about the site doing something that's banned.

If a retailer breaks the law the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) can force it to compensate consumers – the exact process and amounts will depend on future regulations. It's a much-needed change because the CMA estimates that UK households spend on average around £900 a year after being influenced by online reviews. The DMCC also strengthens your rights on subscriptions, but these protections won't be implemented until spring 2026. We'll cover the changes in more detail later.

Have I only got two weeks to return train screen?

Q I recently spent £89 on a mini screen showing live train departures (pictured) from https://traindepartures.com. I'm unable to get it to function because the link to register it doesn't work. The terms of sale say I've got only two weeks in which to return the device. Is that right?

Robert Willis

A It's right in the sense that the Consumer Contract Regulations give you two weeks to tell a retailer you're rejecting an item for any reason (ie, it doesn't have to be faulty). You then have a further two weeks to return it.

However, the Consumer Rights Act gives you longer to return an item if it *is* faulty. The mini screen itself may not be faulty, but Robert can't get it to work because the retailer (Travel Departures Ltd) has given him the wrong link to register. This means the device isn't fit for purpose.

Robert can therefore ask for a full refund within the first six months of purchase without having to prove it doesn't work, though the retailer is allowed to attempt a repair or replacement (but not both).

We'll contact the retailer to ask why it's ignoring Robert, and also seek help from National Rail Enquiries which "powers" the website.

CASE ONGOING

Can I return a new laptop if I've opened the box?

Q Currys is currently advertising an ASUS Zenbook S 16 laptop (pictured) at an attractive price. However, it won't deliver it to a home address, only to a Currys store.

I'd like to try the keyboard before buying it. However, Currys' terms state that a product bought in-store can only be returned if it's in the sealed box. If I order the laptop online and pick it up in-store, can I return it if I open the box?

John Knight

A Yes, John can return it if he opens the box. Because he's unable to examine the laptop in person to see if it's suitable for his needs, he's protected by the Consumer Contract Regulations. These let you reject an item for any reason if you were unable to examine it before purchase. They override any terms stated by Currys.

The only snag would be if he uses the laptop in any way, which means performing any meaningful task on it, such as registering it, installing software or connecting to the internet. Opening the box and checking the keyboard certainly *isn't* using it.

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Anker answered my questions about earbud charging

I recently bought some Anker Soundcore P20i True Wireless Earbuds (£25 from www.snipca.com/53026, pictured), which you recommended in Issue 699's Cover Feature on ditching cables. I'm pleased with them, but emailed Anker with some questions about charging.

They told me the earbuds don't support fast charging and confirmed that a 10-minute recharge provides about one hour of playback. They also said the earbuds can last up to 10 hours 30 minutes on a single full charge, while with the charging case you'll get a total of 30 hours of listening time.

Talking of the case, they answered my question about its battery, saying it has a 700mAh capacity. This takes about 2 hours 30 minutes to fully charge. Anker's responses were prompt and in plain English. They answered every question I had and offered me more assistance if I needed it. Great customer service!

John Ryan

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Anker

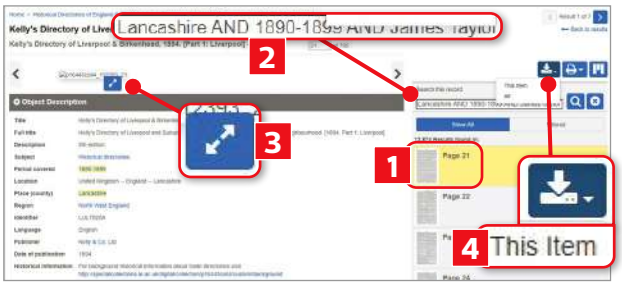
- **Email** support@anker.com
- **Phone** 01604 936 200

Grow Your Family Tree

If people in your family worked as blacksmiths, ironmongers or in similar trades, follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Find metalworking ancestors

Trade directories are an excellent resource, providing valuable information about communities and the professions of people living within an area. They also include advertisements of businesses and workers. This makes them ideal for tracking down ancestors who worked in specific sectors, such as any form of metal work.



Search for a name then filter it by period, place and region

Search trade directories by name

Start at Leicester University's 'Historical Directories of England and Wales' database, which has 689 directories from the 1760s to 1910s. Before diving in, watch this video explaining how to search (www.snipca.com/54217), then visit www.snipca.com/54218. Now search for a name at the top right and press Enter.

You can now scroll down to see all the directories in the results, or narrow your search by period, place and region on the right. Once you've found a directory you're interested in, click it and you'll see the page number where your ancestor is listed on the right (in yellow – 1 in our screenshot above right). The search filters you chose will be in the box above – we searched for James Taylor, adding Lancashire and 1890-1899 2.

On the left you'll see the page from the directory. If not, the image file might be broken, so click the blue double-headed arrow icon 3 to reveal it. Alternatively, click the download-arrow icon, then select This Item 4 to download it as a PDF.

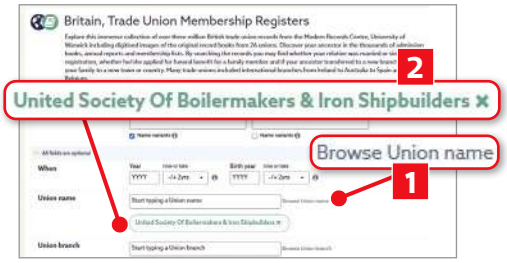
To search specifically for blacksmiths, look in Ancestry's 'U.K. and U.S., Blacksmiths and Related Trades Index, 1720-1940' records (www.snipca.com/54220) – it's free, no subscription required. For metalworkers in Scotland try the Post Office Directories (www.snipca.com/54259), while in Northern Ireland search the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland's directory database (www.snipca.com/54223).

Browse trade union and livery records

Another excellent source is Findmypast's 'Trade Union Membership Registers' (www.snipca.com/54224). Narrow the search by clicking 'Browse Union name' (1 in our screenshot below) and selecting a union, such as the 'United Society of Boilermakers & Iron Shipbuilders'. Any union you pick will appear on the search page 2.

Also look in 'The Records of London's Livery Companies Online' (www.londonroll.org), which has indexes of apprentices and freemen, including metalworkers. Findmypast includes summaries of records held by The Goldsmiths' Company – a livery company dating back to the 14th century – in its 'London Apprenticeship Abstracts, 1442-1850' records (www.snipca.com/54225).

It includes armourers and brasiers, blacksmiths, cutlers, founders, ironmongers, tinplate workers and gunmakers. Many people travelled long distances to serve their apprenticeships in London, so you can find ancestors who originated from all over the UK in these records. Like the trade union records above, you'll need a paid-for subscription to see them.



Choose a metalworking trade union on Findmypast to search its records

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I'm trying to find information on my aunt and uncle. I knew them as Rose and Nick Nicholls. My mother was Pearl Cohen (née Newman) and Rose was her sister. Nick was a cab driver.

Larry Cohen

The 1939 Register for England & Wales (www.snipca.com/54219), taken at the outbreak of war, records your mother living at 24 Grove Dwellings, Stepney. Within the same household is Israel (Nick) and Rosa (Rose) Nickelsberg. Israel's occupation is recorded as taxi driver. Interestingly, the Register – which was renamed the NHS Central Register in 1952 and continued to be updated until 1991 – shows that Rosa changed her surname to Nicholls by filling out an NR230 form in 1948. The General Register Office marriage indexes show Rosa Newman and Israel Nickelsberg married in the September quarter of 1939 in the London City district.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search court-martial records

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OWL LABS

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

IMAGE EDITOR

GIMP 3.0

www.gimp.org
What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux

GIMP – or the GNU Image Manipulation Program, to give it its full name – is commonly regarded as the closest free alternative to Adobe Photoshop. It's packed with expert tools for editing photos, which can make it seem daunting at first, but it provides lots of online tutorials (www.snipca.com/54365) to help you get started.

Incredibly, it's been seven years since the last major GIMP release (2.10), but version 3.0 is finally here, following extensive beta testing. One of the biggest changes is to the program's interface. While the layout remains familiar to long-time users, the design has been streamlined and optimised for high-resolution displays.

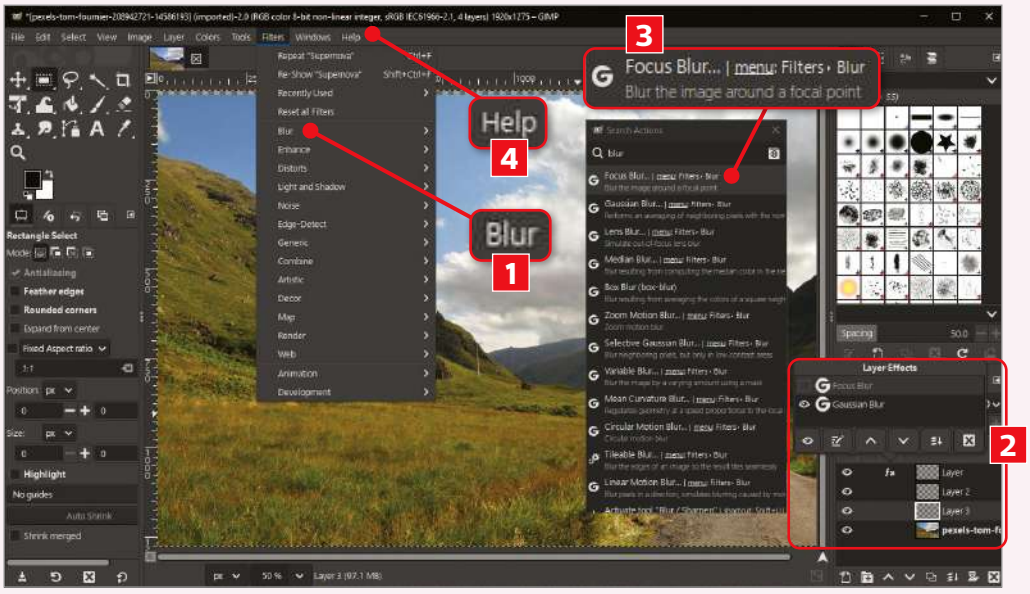
This is a critical improvement, because older versions of GIMP often struggled with scaling issues on larger, high-DPI screens. The updated interface also displays better when using GIMP on Windows tablets.

The program now greets you with a Welcome screen, which makes its learning curve a little less steep. Click the Personalise tab to adjust the colour scheme, font and icon size of the GIMP interface, and the Create tab to open a new image or reopen one you've been working on.

GIMP 3.0 introduces non-destructive editing when applying filters to image layers. In GIMP 2.10, filters were automatically merged with the current layer, which prevented you from making further edits without repeatedly undoing your changes. You can now select, deselect and delete filters individually to save you reverting your work.

Other improvements include support for more image formats, such as JPEG XL (see page 49) and QOI, and better handling of text, so you can quickly distinguish between different fonts and their bold and italic variants.

GIMP has also updated its search tool, which opens when you press the forward-slash key (/). When you search for a particular feature, it now tells you precisely which menu and sub-menu you'll find it in.



1 GIMP offers a huge selection of filters and effects for enhancing your images. These include removing red-eye, turning photos into artwork and various styles of blur. Each filter has its own settings for adjusting its strength and radius.

2 The new non-destructive layer effects in GIMP 3.0 allow you to experiment with filters without them being automatically merged with the current layer. Click the 'fx' icon next to a layer to view, deselect and delete the effects you've applied.

3 To find a specific option in GIMP, press the forward-slash key to open the search tool. Type the name of an action to view matching results, including details of the menus they're located in and their keyboard shortcuts where available.

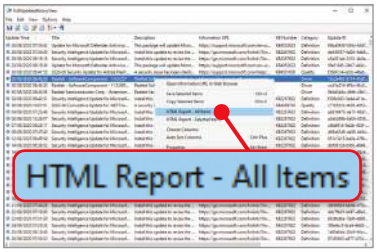
4 With so many advanced tools, GIMP can seem confusing at first, but it includes lots of help to get you started. Click the Help menu and choose User Manual for a complete guide to the program or choose 'Tip of the Day' for helpful hints.

UPDATE VIEWER

FullUpdatesHistoryView 1.0

www.snipca.com/54361

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



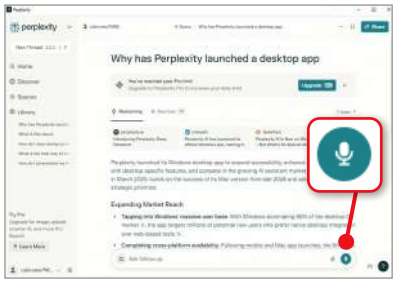
Aside from big feature updates – such as the beleaguered 24H2 – most Windows updates are installed automatically and silently. That's both convenient and safe, but it's still useful to know which updates you've received. FullUpdatesHistoryView is a tiny (223KB) new tool from the prolific developer NirSoft, which reveals your update history in Windows 10 (22H2 and later) and 11. Simply launch the tool and it will detect and list every Windows update that's ever been installed on your PC, using info from the Windows database. You can see the time of each update, as well as its title, description and KB (Knowledge Base) number, and its category – such as security, driver or virus-definitions update. Export the list by right-clicking and choosing 'HTML Report – All Items' (see screenshot). It triggers a SmartScreen warning but it's completely safe to use, so click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

AI SEARCH TOOL

Perplexity 1.1.2

www.snipca.com/54364

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



On page 54 of our 'Complete Guide to AI' Cover Feature in Issue 706, we recommended Perplexity as a faster and more focused alternative to ChatGPT and Google. The AI-powered search engine has now launched its own Windows program (as opposed to Microsoft Store app), so you can use it directly on your desktop without opening your browser. Simply type a query and Perplexity will deliver a speedy response using information from trusted online sources. As with other AI tools, you can speak to it by clicking the Dictate button in the message box (see screenshot), and attach text files to ask Perplexity questions about their content. It also has a Reasoning option for advanced problem solving, and Deep Research for in-depth reports on complex topics. On the downside, Perplexity's Discovery feed is biased towards US news, and its free plan has a few daily limits.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Wise Video Converter Pro

www.snipca.com/54370

Price: £13.87 per year **Free trial:** N/A

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

Wise makes an impressive range of free and freemium programs. Wise Video Converter is one of the latter and offers some useful tools in its simple interface.

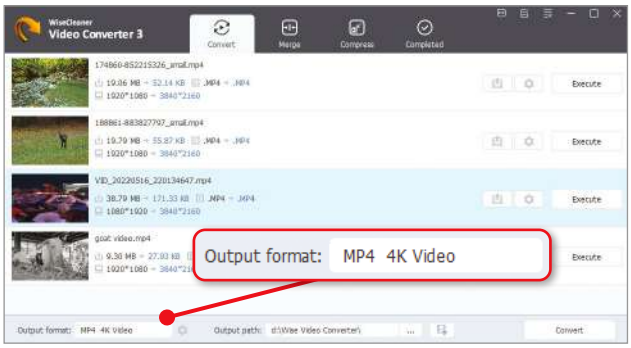
Add some videos to convert, either by dragging them to the main window or by clicking the 'Add video' button in the bottom toolbar. Click the cog next to 'Output format' (see screenshot) to specify which video or audio format to convert the files into, as well as your preferred resolution – for example, 4K Video in MP4 format.

You can also select the device you intend to watch the videos on to set the ideal format and resolution. Options include Apple iPhone and iPad, Samsung and 'Snoy' [we assume Sony], but curiously not Android.

Wise Video Converter lets you enhance videos before you convert them, such as by tweaking the brightness and contrast, applying effects – including blur and sepia – and even adjusting their volume. You can also add a basic watermark.

Click 'Convert' to process all the videos, or Execute to convert them individually. There are also options to merge and compress clips, but annoyingly you have to import them again rather than use videos you've already added.

Strangely, the only advantage of upgrading to the Pro version is that you can convert videos longer than 30 minutes. Aside from that, all options are the same.



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

This isn't one of Wise's better programs, and the Pro version doesn't offer you much extra. We prefer Any Video Converter (www.snipca.com/54373), which is also freemium but offers many more features in both its free and paid-for editions.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What should I use when Microsoft scraps Publisher?

Q I'm concerned that Microsoft is scrapping Publisher in October 2026 (www.snipca.com/54109) and won't support it as part of Microsoft 365. Its suggestion that "many common Publisher scenarios" are available in Word and PowerPoint is nonsense. For people like me who have a large number of Publisher files, this is of little comfort. What free and paid-for alternatives can I use instead?

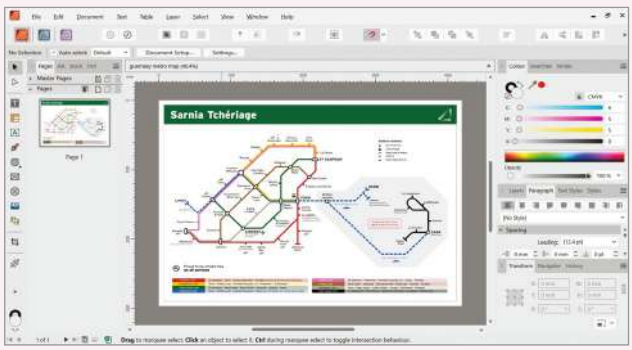
Richard Malin

A Our preferred alternative is Affinity Publisher (www.snipca.com/54183, pictured below), available for one-off fees rather than a subscription: £67.99 on Windows or Mac and £17.99 on iPad, or you can pay £159.99 and get licences for Publisher and its companion software, Designer (similar to Adobe Illustrator) and Photo (similar to Photoshop) for use across Windows, iPad and Mac.

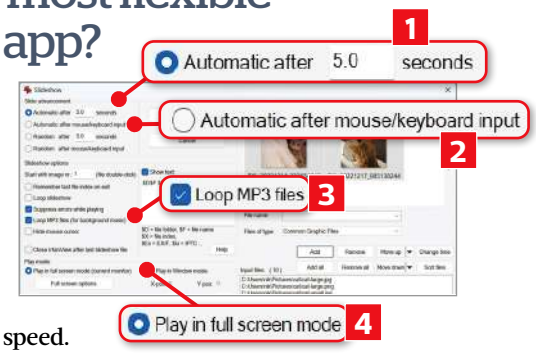
Publisher has many advanced features, like the ability to lay out text on paths, and it's compatible with a wide variety of file formats, so you can import PDFs, images, text and more for use on the page.

In the past, we've also recommended Scribus (www.scribus.net) as a free alternative. Like Publisher, it supports a wide range of image and text formats, and CMYK colour output for professional printing, but you'll have to convert .pub files before importing them.

Before switching, read Microsoft's guidance on what to do with your existing Publisher files – visit www.snipca.com/54184 and expand the 'How to prepare before October 2026'. You'll find instructions on exporting your files to PDF before importing them into Word. You can also import PDFs into both Affinity Publisher and Scribus.



What's the most flexible slideshow app?

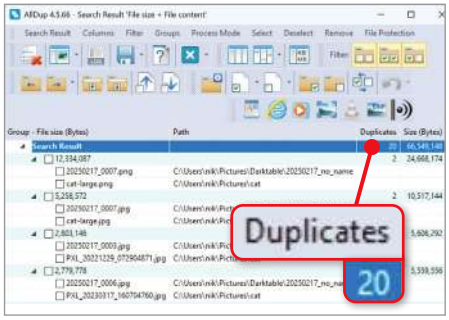


Q I want a slideshow of scanned photos, but I don't like the clunky option in Windows 11's Photos app. You can't vary the transitions nor their speed. Is there a free alternative that has cross-fade and can run at variable speeds?

Phil Hughes

A IrfanView (www.irfanview.com) lets you do this with the minimum of hassle. Settings include how many seconds to show each image (1 in our screenshot), moving to the next slide with a key press 2, looping background music 3, playing in full screen 4, and so on. You can save it as a video to share with friends and family. Going further down the video route, you could import your photos to Clipchamp in Windows (www.snipca.com/54185) and set varying display times and transitions, before once again exporting as a movie.

How can I quickly find duplicate photos?



Q I need to sort out many duplicate photos stored in different folders on an external drive. It will be a mammoth task doing this one by one, so what's the best program for finding a batch of duplicates?

David Walters

A Try AllDup (www.alldup.info), which is our favourite duplicate remover. First, click Source Folders and tick each folder you want to search. Now switch to Search Method and decide which variables are important. When we told it to search file names, file sizes and contents, it got no hits, but unticking file names resulted in 20 files (see screenshot) with matching contents and sizes. As these weren't all in the same folder, it saved us trawling the directories manually.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Roku shows adverts before home screen

I've not watched the 2020 film *Happy Halloween, Scooby-Doo!*, and doubt I ever will, but I don't mind Roku advertising the movie on its home screen (pictured). Roku calls these 'marquee' ads (see www.snipca.com/54272), and they're not too intrusive. If they help keep Roku devices affordable, then so be it.

But recently Roku has been playing adverts *before* the home screen appears, annoying me and thousands of others. I kept seeing a trailer for the Disney film *Moana* 2. Soon the Reddit forum for Roku users was packed with people complaining. Many said they were considering ditching Roku as a result (www.snipca.com/54273).

One poster summed up Roku's dilemma: "I could accept the static ad on the side. Forcing a loud commercial is awful." I agree. We're never going back to a time without ads on streaming devices, but they should only ever appear on menu pages, not shown as soon as you turn on your device.

We'll put up with these ads Roku, but trailers before the home screen? Doo us a favour!

Roku said it's just a trial, and they're hardly the first company to see how far they can push adverts before alienating their customers. But they need to be more careful than most. They've never made an annual profit in their 23-year existence, and Amazon's Fire TV Sticks are nibbling at their market share. Like HP's 15-minute hold time (see Star Letter, page 13), this is the kind of negative story that can cause lasting damage.

These ads are what you'd expect from one of the numerous dodgy streaming apps on the Google Play Store, not from a popular paid-for service. I might switch to Plex, but that's going up in price (see page 9). Zoinks, Scoob, is there any good news anywhere?

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Microsoft www.snipca.com/54191

"High performers tend to have more clear AI roadmaps, more value-driven use cases and a culture of purpose-led change. Yet in contrast, mid-performing organisations may experiment with AI in silos but struggle to scale it more widely. Meanwhile, those at the lower end of the scale find themselves grappling with the stymying effects of scepticism, analysis paralysis and limited leadership buy-in."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Good companies use AI effectively; bad companies don't. All our pretentiously long words prove that we're the former.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Libby Vernon

EBay doesn't have a 'fake baby bump' category, but that didn't stop Libby Vernon finding one listed. The 23-year-old from Stoke bought it to convince her long-distance boyfriend – who she met online and lives in Cumbria – that she was pregnant with twins from a previous partner. She also downloaded fake ultrasound scans from the internet.

Her scam then took a dark turn. Four days after the 'birth', she was on a video call with her boyfriend, who could see a cot in the background. She then called out the baby's name in mock panic, abruptly ended the call, and claimed soon after that the baby had died from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

It all left the victim feeling abused and humiliated. Vernon pleaded guilty to several charges of sending communication conveying false information at Workington Magistrates' Court and is now serving six months behind bars.

Credit: Staffordshire Police

MINI PC | **£700** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54341

GMKtec NucBox K11

No expanse spared

When buying a desktop PC, we often recommend ensuring that there's plenty of scope for upgrading in the future. This is more difficult with mini PCs, because their size means there's hardly any room for future upgrades. This is less of a problem with Chinese manufacturer NucBox's K11 machine, however, which comes with a surprising amount of space for future improvements.

> "Loads of ports, superb performance and generous upgrade opportunities"

That said, its base specification is pretty impressive – enough to make it our new favourite mini PC. It arrives with an AMD Ryzen 9 8945HS processor, 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD. That's the same processor and RAM that you'll find in our previous favourite, the Geekom A8 (£854 from www.snipca.com/51157, reviewed in Issue 689). While the K11 has half the storage, that lower price tag makes it good value for money.

Given it has many of the same components, it's no surprise to see it tracking the Geekom A8 closely in our benchmark tests. The K11 flew through tasks that push the processor to its limits and also performed admirably in graphics tests, with resource-hungry 3D games running reasonably smoothly at 1080p resolution – as long as you don't turn up the graphical detail to the max.

There's enough space inside to increase RAM to 96GB, should you ever need that much. Likewise, the supplied 1TB SSD occupies only one of two available M.2 slots, meaning it's easy to add another, or load both slots with 4TB drives to max it out at 8TB.

Other upgrade opportunities are offered by its OCuLink port. We've seen these ports before – most notably in the GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro (£363 from www.snipca.com/54196, reviewed in Issue 697) – but GMKtec now offers a ready-made external graphics card that will plug into it.

The company's AD-GP1 External GPU Docking Station (£360 from www.snipca.com/54197, pictured left) has an AMD Radeon 7600M XT graphics card and connects directly to the OCuLink port to boost graphics power significantly.

We'll review the Docking Station in an upcoming issue, but should you ever need more graphics power from your K11, this offers an instant solution.

The K11 itself is on the large side for a mini PC, measuring 58x127x132mm (HxWxD). That's still small enough to mount on the back of a monitor, but it allows room for the cooling system required to keep the processor from overheating. The lid-mounted fan glows with a spectrum of RGB lights, though you can switch them off.

It has a comprehensive selection of ports. On the front panel, alongside the OCuLink port, there's one USB 4.0, two USB 3.2 ports and a headphone jack. On the back there's a second USB 4.0, two USB 2.0 ports, two 2.5Gb Ethernet ports, an HDMI socket and a DisplayPort.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core AMD Ryzen 9 8945HS processor • 32GB RAM • AMD Radeon 780M Graphics • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x 2.5Gb Ethernet ports • 1x OCuLink port • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 2x USB 4.0 ports • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • Windows 11 Pro • 58x127x132mm (HxWxD) • 624g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54194

VERDICT A great-value mini PC whose superb performance, reasonable price and impressive upgrade potential makes it our brand new favourite

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro £363 Also has an OCuLink port, but comes with an older, less powerful processor to keep the price down

ALL-IN-ONE PC | **£742** from Dell www.snipca.com/54213

Dell OptiPlex All-in-One 7420

Means business

Like other all-in-one PCs, Dell's OptiPlex 7420 is a desktop PC built into a monitor. As such, it's designed to save space in your home office and is aimed at work-orientated users who mostly carry out Windows-based office tasks, such as word processing, spreadsheet building, emails and other undemanding productivity software. It combines reliable performance with a sleek design.

> "A sleek, reliable and versatile all-in-one that's aimed at home workers"

Our test unit was powered by an Intel Core i5-14500T processor, along with 8GB RAM and a 256GB SSD. But you can opt to upgrade to 16GB and 512GB respectively for an extra £98, which would be worth doing if your budget allows. However, we found the basic version booted Windows 11 Pro quickly, and ran general software well.

SPECIFICATIONS

Fourteen-core Intel Core i5-14500T processor • 8GB RAM • Intel UHD 770 graphics • 23.8in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 256GB SSD • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB3.2 ports • 2x USB2.0 ports • 1x DisplayPort • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Windows 11 Pro • 354x540x58mm (HxWxD) • 7.51kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54213

The monitor is a 23.8in, 1920x1080-pixel panel. At 1080p resolution, it isn't the highest-quality display we've seen recently and lacks precise colour accuracy, but it's perfectly fine for less graphically intensive jobs. It comes with a robust stand that can be adjusted in height and tilted to suit your needs.

If you prefer there's also a VESA mount on the rear, so it can be hung from a wall or attached to a different stand entirely. At this price, you also get Dell's wireless keyboard and mouse thrown in (pictured above), though you can remove these from the order and save yourself £39.

We liked the built-in webcam, which pops out from the top of the screen when you need it, and can be pushed back in again when not in use to ensure your privacy. This produces decent video-call streams in all kinds of lighting conditions and can record in resolutions up to 1080p.

The OptiPlex has built-in speakers that look like a soundbar running along the bottom of the screen. Audio quality is good enough for Windows sounds and is fine for video calls, but you're unlikely to want to play music through it.

There's a wide selection connectivity options (most pictured left) – with two USB 3.2 and two USB 2.0 ports on the rear, another USB 3.2 on the side for easy access, and a USB-C port on the bottom. There's also a DisplayPort that you can use to connect a second monitor, and a Gigbit Ethernet socket, though Wi-Fi 6E is also supported.

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT An affordable 23.8in PC/monitor that handles productivity tasks well and has a good webcam, but don't expect fireworks from its screen

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE HP 27in All-in-One 27-cr1009na £1,099 More expensive, but comes with a larger 27in screen and a more powerful processor

PC MONITOR | **£90** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54243

BenQ GW2490

Cheap thrills

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

What is this monitor's biggest selling point? Probably its price – the BenQ GW2490 is the cheapest 24in display we've ever reviewed. At just £90 we can forgive the fact that it offers few luxuries, but that doesn't mean we weren't impressed with what you do get.

> "For the low price, it offers a surprisingly good screen and well-designed controls"

Putting the monitor together is a breeze. The basic, plasticky stand comes in two parts and simply slots together, clicking into place with no tools or screws required. There's no height adjustment, but the stand tilts back and forth so you can secure the angle that suits you. The borders of the screen are black plastic, but it doesn't feel flimsy or cheap, and the whole thing looks surprisingly attractive.

The various ports at the rear (pictured below) all face down, with the power cable connecting on the right side of the stand and all remaining ports on the left. In total, there are two HDMI ports and a single DisplayPort, as well as a 3.5mm audio output. Be aware that because the height of the stand is fixed it's tricky to connect cables without laying the monitor down flat. This is because the ports are annoyingly close to the stand's neck, so it's hard to see what you're doing. Best to get this all sorted when you first set it up.

One nice surprise is that the BenQ's physical controls and on-screen display are well thought out – we've seen cruder systems on monitors more than twice the price. These are located under the monitor's right edge and comprise three clicky buttons alongside a four-way joystick. Helpfully, the power button lights up with a faint white LED when it's on, and this changes to amber if the attached PC goes into sleep mode.

The joystick makes light work of navigating the on-screen display, while the interface prioritises quick access to the various picture modes, brightness settings and speaker volume. It only takes two clicks to get into the full menu, however, where you can adjust all the usual features.

More unusually, it has a button for accessing the Low Blue Light Plus mode. Tapping this takes you through five strength levels before switching it off again. Each tap makes the image look significantly warmer and more reddish, which is easier on the eye if you're working in the evening.

Predictably, the speakers aren't useful for anything more than the odd Windows alert, so you're going to need external speakers or headphones if you want to listen to music or watch a movie.

The IPS panel has a Full HD resolution of 1920x1080 pixels and we were impressed with its performance in our tests. Brightness reached a maximum level of 225cd/m², which is enough for general office work, and also looked reasonable when streaming movies. Contrast is exactly what you'd expect of a standard IPS screen – we measured a contrast ratio of 1,183:1.

Our test images looked good, and despite slightly oversaturated reds, pinks and greens, you'd need an expert eye to detect its deficits. Colours are vibrant and skin tones look natural. We managed to improve the colour accuracy in the default setup simply by adjusting the User profile's RGB controls and toning down the green and red channels.

While you might get a clearer picture from a higher-resolution screen, this monitor's 100Hz refresh rate adds a satisfactory smoothness to the viewing experience. Scrolling is significantly silkier than on standard 60Hz panels, so text remains more legible as you scroll up and down longer documents. It's a small bonus, but very welcome nonetheless.

SPECIFICATIONS

24in IPS screen • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 16:9 aspect ratio • 100Hz refresh rate • 5ms response time • 1x DisplayPort • 2x HDMI ports • 409x540x180mm (HxWxD) • 3.93kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/54243

VERDICT A decent, no-frills monitor that's a bargain at less than £100

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Philips 27E1N1600AE £202 A larger 27in monitor with a higher resolution, which means you can squeeze more on to its screen

TABLET | **£599** from Apple www.snipca.com/54274

Apple iPad Air

Power play

Apple's new iPad Air doesn't change much on the outside. There's a good reason for that – only last year it expanded the iPad Air to two sizes (11in and 13in – reviewed in Issue 686), moved the front-facing camera to the middle for best use in landscape orientation, tossed in support for the Apple Pencil Pro, and upgraded it to the M2 chip.

> "Its upgraded chip lets you work and play faster, and the battery lets you do it for longer"

Less than 12 months later, Apple has kept the same prices and colours, but kits out the Air with a more powerful processor – the M3. The result is a faster yet refreshingly familiar experience, whether you want a tablet for work or play (or both).

In our tests, the faster processor let us tweak photos in Photoshop and edit a home movie in Final Cut Pro, then export the files in no time.

It worked well with all our office apps, ran every game we tried on it and is brilliant for streaming video. It's not significantly better than last year's model, so isn't an essential upgrade for those who own its predecessor, but it closes the performance gap between the Air and the iPad Pro (£999 from www.snipca.com/54284), which uses the even faster M4 processor.

We tested the 11in model, which is slim, lightweight and therefore easy to carry around. The whole device measures 248x179x6.1mm and weighs 460g – that's actually two grams lighter than its predecessor. And it proved to be an excellent work device when teamed with the Magic Keyboard and Apple Pencil Pro (optional extras).

The Liquid Retina screen is excellent. It's an IPS panel rather than OLED (you need the iPad Pro for that), but it's still incredibly eye-catching. The colours are vibrant and punchy, and contrast is impressive. It's not the brightest display we've ever seen, at only 500cd/m², but it has an excellent anti-reflective coating that helps to compensate when you're outside, keeping everything on screen very visible. Battery life is also superb, lasting between eight and 10 hours between charges.

The basic iPad (£329 from www.snipca.com/54275) is still the best entry point for iPads, but if you already have one and are thinking of stepping up to a new model, this is a very worthy upgrade.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Apple M3 processor • 8GB RAM • 11in 2360x1640-pixel resolution IPS screen • 128GB storage • 12-megapixel rear camera • 12-megapixel front camera • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • iPadOS 18 • 248x179x6.1mm (HxWxD) • 460g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54274

VERDICT A performance upgrade to Apple's mid-range iPads that offers a quicker interface, an eye-catching screen and decent battery life

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Apple iPad £329

The company's entry-level tablet is great value and will satisfy most people's needs

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Motherboard chipsets

What are they?

A PC's chipset is hardware built into its motherboard that controls connectivity and flow of information between your processor and other components, such as storage, PCIe expansion slots and USB ports.

How do they work?

In early PCs the chipset consisted of several electronic components. Over time this was simplified down to two parts: the northbridge for the fastest elements, such as RAM; and the southbridge for slower parts such as hard drives. In modern PCs these two have been absorbed into a single chip, and common jobs are increasingly handled by the main processor.

What are their specs?

Most motherboards are designed to work with AMD and Intel processors, and use chipsets compatible with these manufacturers' specifications. Intel has three chipset types for PCs – each starts with a different letter. H chipsets are for entry-level PCs; B are mid-range; and Z are for high-end PCs. AMD uses A, B and X for entry-level, mid-range and high-end respectively. For example, the Asus Prime H610M-A motherboard (£99 from www.snipca.com/54283, pictured) is an entry-level motherboard for Intel processors.

If you're buying a new PC, particularly one from a company such as PCSpecialist that lets you choose your own components (www.pcspecialist.co.uk), it's worth checking what the motherboard's chipset is capable of before selecting one. This will affect the number of components that can be handled and how fast they perform.

Can I change them later?

You'd need to remove the motherboard from a desktop PC and put a new one in. It's possible, but it's a big job. Laptops tend to use specific motherboards and aren't designed to be upgraded.

SMARTPHONE | **£449** from Nothing www.snipca.com/54264

Nothing Phone 3a Pro

Clear winner

The Nothing Phone 3a Pro is too expensive to be a budget Android phone, but it's nowhere near as pricey as high-end models from brands like Google and Samsung. However, it still has some of the best features you'll find on these more expensive devices.

> "A unique transparent design and a large screen that dazzles"

For example, it ditches the plastic casing you often find on cheaper phones and replaces it with hardened glass, which gives it a luxurious feel in the hand. Even more unusual is that the glass is transparent, so you can see through the rear panel to the inner workings (as pictured above right). This gives it a very distinctive appearance.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 7s Gen 3 processor • 12GB RAM • 256GB storage • 6.77in 120Hz 2392x1080-pixel AMOLED screen • 50-megapixel rear camera • 3x optical zoom • 8-megapixel ultrawide camera • 50-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.4 • Android 15 with NothingOS • 164x78x8.4mm (HxWxD) • 211g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54264

It has several built-in LEDs that you can configure into different coloured patterns. You can then assign these to specific contacts, letting you see at a glance who's calling, even if you have the phone on silent and the screen is facing down. It's a nice touch and our only niggle with the design is that at 8.4mm it's a little thicker than some of its nearest rivals.

Some of this extra room may be required to accommodate the 3x optical zoom lens. This is brilliant for framing shots as you take them, so there's less cropping needed later. The phone also has the main 50-megapixel camera and an 8-megapixel ultrawide lens for when you're struggling to fit your composition into the regular frame.

The picture quality of the main camera is decent, but not quite up to the standards we've seen on other similar phones. While the images look fine when viewed casually, close examination shows them to be rougher around the edges than we'd like.

The 3a Pro uses a Qualcomm Snapdragon 7s Gen 3 processor, supported by a generous 12GB of RAM and 256GB of storage. That isn't a powerful enough combination to cope with the most demanding current games, but it's perfectly fine for regular Android work, such as web browsing and reading emails.

Battery life was excellent in our tests, easily lasting a full day on a single charge with juice to spare. It's capable of fast charging, though Nothing doesn't provide a charger. You'll need to use your own 50W charger to benefit. When we used one it took just 50 minutes to go from zero to 100 per cent.

We loved the 6.77in AMOLED screen, which is luxuriously large. It has a variable refresh rate of 120Hz, so is slick and smooth in use, and we measured a dazzling peak brightness of 1300cd/m².

VERDICT Has a quirky design, superb 3x optical zoom lens and an amazing screen

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Google Pixel 7a £299 A more standard design and no optical zoom, but it's cheaper and takes better pictures

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Can you suggest a mini PC with built-in webcam?

Q The last mini PC I bought was the Minisforum MC560, which you reviewed in Issue 660 and has a built-in webcam. I'm looking to upgrade to a new mini PC, but I haven't seen any with built-in webcams in your recent reviews. If I get one without a webcam, are they easy to add on, and what's the best model to buy?

John van Someren

A Minisforum still makes a mini PC with a built-in webcam. We haven't reviewed the AtomMan X7 Ti (£765 from www.snipca.com/54266, pictured), so can't vouch for it, but it has a 1080p webcam built into the case. This can be used for video calls or signing into Windows using facial recognition.

It's easy to add a webcam to any mini PC, because they are compatible with all the same webcams that can be used with desktop PCs.

Our current favourite is the Logitech C925e Business Webcam (£65 from www.snipca.com/50751). This clips on to the top of your monitor and connects to the PC via USB. Clip-on webcams have the benefit of being easier to adjust because you don't have to move the entire PC into position.

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JBL Tune 310C

Play it by ear

The JBL Tune 310C is a pair of wired earbuds that aim to bring high-quality audio for a very low price. Earbuds this cheap often suffer from tinny audio, a flat design and limited features, but this isn't the case here.

You're not going to get stunning sound quality out of buds this cheap. Yes, they can decode hi-res files thanks to their built-in digital analogue converter (DAC), but we never got an incredibly detailed listen when testing them. Despite that, bass-heavy tracks were solid, which is something that's often lacking, even in more expensive models. Vocals were clear and sharp, with no muffling or distortion.

And if you don't like what you're hearing, you can tweak them to suit your tastes. The earbuds come with three built-in equaliser options, which is a rare feature even in more expensive rivals. The options are Default, which offers a balanced output; Bass, which ramps up low-end frequencies; and Vocal, which lifts voices up from the mix.

We stuck with Default when listening to music, because the Bass mode occasionally sounded a little bloated. The Vocal setting, meanwhile, did a great job of enriching podcasts, audiobooks and talk radio shows.

We also liked the inclusion of different-sized caps to suit a range of ear sizes and shapes.

SPECIFICATIONS

9mm dynamic speaker drivers • 20–40kHz frequency range • USB-C cable • IPX2 ingress protection • 14.3g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/54257

VERDICT Incredibly cheap wired earbuds with surprisingly good sound quality and features

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Soundmagic E80 £33 These wired earbuds push the sound quality further but cost twice as much

SMART SPEAKER | **£389** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54258

Samsung Music Frame HW-LS60D

Wall of sound

If you don't like tech items cluttering up your home, the Samsung Music Frame may be just the thing for you. It's a smart speaker that's cleverly disguised as a picture frame.

It comes with an attractive top-down view of a record player, but this can be replaced by any printed image that fits into the 8x8in space. Bear in mind, the front panel isn't a digital screen, so it can't double as a digital photo frame.

It weighs 4.6kg, which makes it a relatively hefty item to hang on a wall, though it comes with a stand so you can simply place it on a worktop, desk or shelf.

If you *were* to hang it on the wall, you still have to power it from a plug socket. The connecting wire is thin and not too obtrusive, but still visible when dangling from the bottom of the speaker. We think it looks better in its stand (as pictured) with the cable hidden than it does on the wall.

Setting up the Frame is done through the Samsung SmartThings app. The process is very simple and took us around 30 seconds. Once that's done, the speaker can connect to your devices via Bluetooth 5.2, AirPlay 2 or Chromecast, and you can also control it using Amazon Alexa. You can stream from Spotify and Tidal too.

It fills a large room with strong, expansive sound. We found it went significantly louder than its closest rival, the Ikea Symfonisk (£220 from www.snipca.com/39368, reviewed in Issue 615), though the audio wasn't as detailed.

You can get an even better speaker for your money if you don't mind it actually *looking* like one. The Sonos Era 100 (£249 from www.snipca.com/45640, reviewed in Issue 656), for example, sounds brilliant and has most of the same features.

SPECIFICATIONS

Six speakers • Two channels • Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 5.2 • Optical in • Supports AirPlay 2, Google Cast, Spotify Connect and Tidal Connect • Amazon Alexa voice assistant • 364x353x54mm (HxWxD) • 4.6kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54258

VERDICT A smart speaker that's attractive enough to hang on your wall, but you can get better audio from more standard speakers

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Ikea Symfonisk £220 Ikea's wall-mountable speaker isn't as loud, but it sounds better

TRACKING TAG | **£45** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54291

GlocalMe KeyTracker

Finders, keepers

Tracking devices such as Apple's AirTag (£35 from www.snipca.com/54298, reviewed in Issue 607) and Android-compatible Tile Pro (£24 from www.snipca.com/54295, reviewed in Issue 619) are a great way to keep an eye on your possessions. However, both require other users to be within Bluetooth range of the device you're tracking, which is fine at an airport but less likely in more remote areas.

> "It offers more ways to track your possessions, but it's too large for pocket-sized items"

The GlocalMe KeyTracker takes this concept a few steps further, using GPS, Wi-Fi and mobile-phone networks to identify your missing item's location and report back to an Android or iOS app on your phone.

The KeyTracker is much larger than its rivals – more than four times the weight of an AirTag. That said, it's not enough to tip your suitcase over an aircraft's luggage weight restriction, and it's still small enough to fit in a backpack or handbag. However, we think it's a little too large for tracking pocket-sized items such as keys.

While the battery in Bluetooth-based devices such as the AirTag can last up to a year, the KeyTracker's reliance on the mobile-phone network means it only works for around nine days between charges. That should be enough to track your luggage on a long-haul journey, but it might not be sufficient if you want something to monitor your car while parked in an airport car park when you jet off on holiday.

We tested it by packing it into a parcel

and sending it on a journey from Peterborough to London. We armed the device, hid it in the package and handed it over to a courier. We could see that it stayed overnight in Lutterworth, and then followed its journey down the M1 the next day.

It comes with a free month of the GlocalMe positioning service. After that, subscriptions are available for as little as $1.58 (£1.22) a month for location updates every 45 minutes. You'll need to pay $8.25 (£6.36) a month for real-time tracking. That makes the KeyTracker more expensive than Apple and Tile alternatives, but that's worth it if you don't want to be so reliant on other users being nearby.

SPECIFICATIONS

GPS, BeiDou, GLONASS, AGPS, LBS, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi location reporting • Reports back on 4G mobile network • 960mAh battery • 1x USB-C charging port • 84x46x9.2mm (HxWxD) • 45g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54291

VERDICT A handy device that uses different technologies to find lost items, but it's much larger than rivals

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Tile Pro £24

Should be fine for tracking items in busy cities but is less effective in remote areas

DO I REALLY NEED...

A laptop with an expanding screen?

What is it?

Taiwanese manufacturer Compal (www.compal.com) has won an iF Design award for its Infinite Laptop (www.snipca.com/54297, pictured) – a device with a screen that extends horizontally.

What does it do?

Although it looks like a regular 14in laptop when folded up, a rolling screen expands on both sides when opened. It can stretch to 18in across the diagonal.

What's the catch?

It's only a concept at the moment. Compal is unlikely to produce the laptops under its own brand, but might sell the design to other manufacturers. It has done this previously with laptops that Dell and HP went on to sell.

So can I do without it?

Yes – simply buy a laptop with a larger screen or work across portable monitors.

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£799 from www.snipca.com/51831
Tested Issue 683

This laptop has the same processor (Intel Core Ultra 7 155H) as our previous favourite (Acer Swift Go 14), but manages to squeeze more speed out of it. It also comes with 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Excellent value overall.

ALTERNATIVE Acer Swift Go 14 Still a fast and powerful laptop, with a great 14in screen. £699 from www.snipca.com/49733

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £656 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.9in
£329 from www.snipca.com/53977
Tested Issue 646

The price of the 10th-generation iPad, released in 2022, has fallen far enough that it's the best-value model. The link above takes you to Apple, but also check John Lewis where it's been as low as £309.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

PRICE DROP

Honor MagicPad2
£449 from www.snipca.com/53150
Tested Issue 700

With a larger screen (12.3in) than the Galaxy Tab S9 (below) and a similar performance for less money, Honor's MagicPad2 is a superb new tablet. The OLED screen has a strikingly sharp resolution, and yet battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £799 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £549 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 7a
£299 from www.snipca.com/53388
Tested Issue 660

A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Nothing Phone 2a Don't be put off by the odd name. This has a distinctive design, superb camera and decent battery life. From a UK company too. £279 from www.snipca.com/49930

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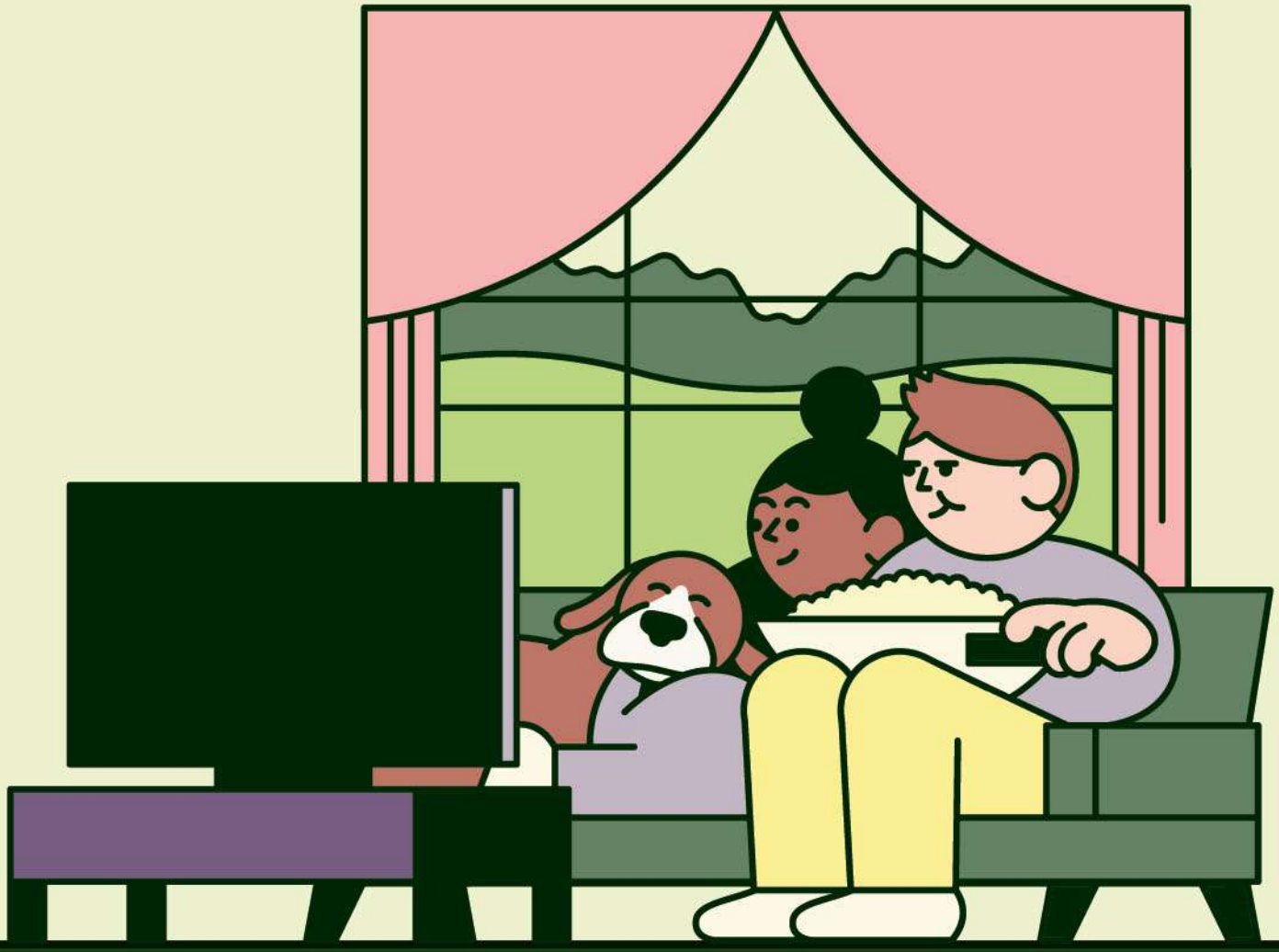

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

NEW ENTRY

GMKtec NucBox K11
£700 from www.snipca.com/54341
Tested Issue 707

A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8
Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage.

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629

Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £19.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£65 from www.snipca.com/50751
Tested Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £32 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£187 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£79 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £79; 2TB costs £135.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £51 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 4...

Majority Elias 2.0.2 Dolby Atmos soundbars

Majority's Elias 2.0.2 soundbars deliver 160W audio power to create cinematic sound in your home. The 3D Dolby Atmos surround-sound system creates a wide soundstage with precise audio placement. The up-firing speakers envelop you in an overhead audio experience from every angle.

It has all the connectivity you need, including HDMI ARC, optical, AUX, USB and Bluetooth. It offers unparalleled versatility and ease of use, making it perfect for the growing needs of modern-day entertainment – whether you're watching movies, listening to music or playing the latest games.

The included mounting bracket and fixings ensure a seamless, secure installation on your wall, while the convenient remote control lets you adjust settings with ease.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/54344 and submit your details by midnight of 22 April. Good luck!

You can buy the Majority Elias 2.0.2 Dolby Atmos Soundbar for £99.99 from www.snipca.com/54345. For more Majority products, including DVD players, microphones, speakers and turntables, visit www.majority.co.uk and 'like' www.facebook.com/MajorityAudio.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£250 from www.snipca.com/51715
Tested Issue 676

This has recently risen in price from £180, but it's still better value than the ET-1810 because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for £110 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos, which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £160 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£199 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung CU8000
More expensive, but has a 55in LED screen and sharp 4K resolution. Connectivity is good, with three HDMI and two USB ports. £419 from www.snipca.com/52110

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800
£210 from www.snipca.com/52957
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £210 from www.snipca.com/52051

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HOW TO...

Access your Windows computers remotely

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: AnyViewer; Remote Desktop Connection **Time required:** 30 minutes

As time moves on, technologies fall out of fashion. Yesterday's essential software is tomorrow's outdated program – and something will inevitably take its place.

The latest victim is Microsoft Remote Desktop, which has been available from the Microsoft Store (at www.snipca.com/54299, pictured right) since 2012, but will stop working on 27 May.

It uses a technology called Remote Desktop Protocol to connect Windows computers across a network, allowing users at one machine to work with any other. Before we explain your options once it vanishes, it helps to understand how this kind of remote-control software works and what the technology does.

The Remote Desktop app is still available on its Store, but Microsoft is axing it on 27 May

1 Understand how remote desktops work

Remote desktop platforms rely on two pieces of software. One lives on the remote (host) computer, where it listens for incoming connections. This program is the remote desktop 'server': it 'serves' a copy of the distant computer's screen to whoever is accessing it. The other piece of software is the remote desktop 'client', which lives on the 'local' computer that you're using to access the remote host.

But these programs don't only swap data between the two machines. They also encrypt it. This means the host and client computers can verify that they are what the other one thinks they are.

Rather than thinking about securing some data, which is difficult to visualise, imagine someone needs to send you a printed document. They could place it in a box, lock it with a key, and send it. But you'll need a copy of the key to open it. And sending the key along with the box would be so insecure as to defeat the whole point of locking it in the first place.

So, instead, everyone makes two sets of keys. One is a public key, of which they can cut thousands, to send out to anyone who wants one. The other is a private key, of which there's only ever a single copy, which they keep themselves. Anything that's been locked using a public key can only ever be unlocked by the corresponding private key, and vice versa.

Now imagine I want to send you a message, which no one else can read in transit, and which you can be completely sure comes from me. I'll first place it in a small box and lock it using my private key. Nobody else will be able to lock a box in such a way, so when you receive it you would definitely know it's from me as only my public key (of which I've given you a copy) can unlock it.

But there's a problem: because everyone has a copy of my public key, everyone can get to read – and potentially alter – the document. So, I'll take the small box and put it in a bigger box. This time, I lock that box using your public key. Remember, anything locked with a public key can only be unlocked by the corresponding private key. And only one person has the corresponding private key for your public key – which is you.

So, when the package arrives, only you can unlock the outer box, which means you know for sure that the contents haven't been messed with. And when you take out the smaller box, only my public

key will unlock it. You'll therefore know not only that the contents are genuine, but also that they definitely came from me – as my public key couldn't be used to unlock any box that's been locked by anyone else's private key.

Remote-access software uses a similar system of keys (which are actually just very, very long numbers) to scramble the data they send back and forth. In doing so they verify both the origin of the data and its validity, to make sure no one has tampered with it and that anyone who hasn't been granted access is pretending to be an authorised user.

2 Use Microsoft's Remote Desktop Connection

Microsoft Remote Desktop handles all the digital box locking and unlocking, as well as the transmission of data between the two machines. It makes it easy to sit at one machine and use another, in a program window, as though that remote PC was right in front of you.

When Remote Desktop ends, Microsoft recommends that users switch to the Windows App (www.snipca.com/54267), but this is only available to users with a work or school account. It's continuing to add features to the app, so we imagine it'll become more widely available in future. In the meantime, you can continue to use Remote Desktop Connection (www.snipca.com/54268), which is built into Windows. Microsoft will continue to support this after its namesake app has been scrapped.

Unlike the Remote Desktop app it doesn't let you connect to multiple computers simultaneously, but it's simple to use if you need to quickly hop on to another PC.

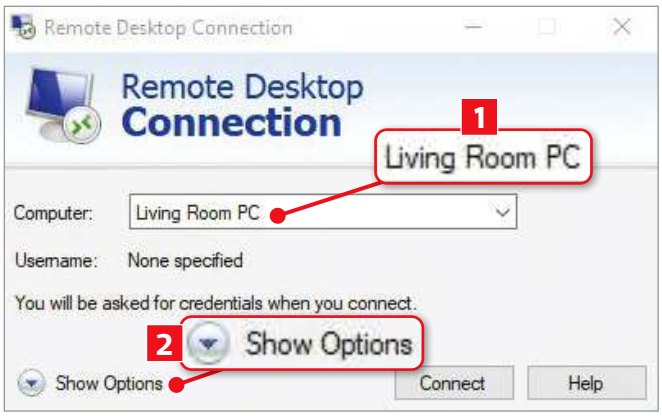
First, on the computer you want to control, open Windows Settings, click System, then Remote Desktop, and turn on Enable Remote Desktop. Now return to your host computer and search for then open Remote Desktop Connection. Now type the name of the computer you want to connect to (1 in our screenshot above), then log in using the same username and password for that remote computer. Once you're connected, the remote computer's screen will fill your window. To change settings such as display or audio, click 'Show Options' 2 and open the relevant tabs.

How I connect to remote computers

I use Raspberry Pi Connect (https://connect.raspberrypi.com) to manage several Raspberry Pi computers around the home, and NoMachine (www.nomachine.com) to connect to various Linux computers on my home network. I don't often need to remotely connect to Windows machines, but now that AnyViewer is set up and ready to go, that's what I'll be using the next time I do.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you connect to PCs remotely? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk



You can still use Remote Desktop Connection in Windows, but it doesn't let you connect to multiple computers

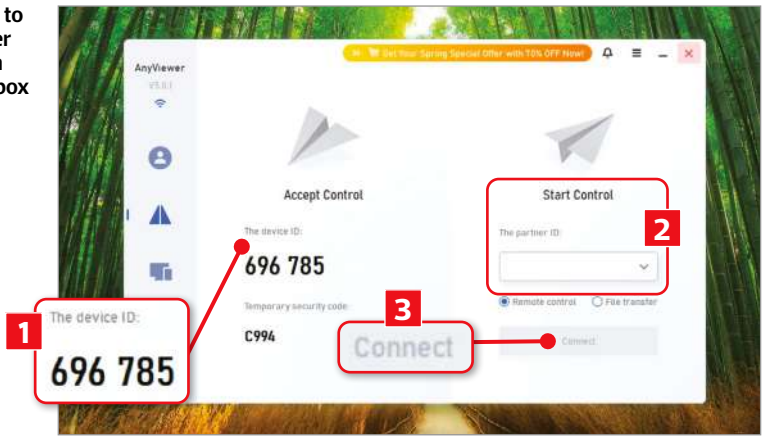
3 Use AnyViewer to connect to multiple PCs

If you find Remote Desktop Connection too restrictive, try the excellent third-party software AnyViewer, which lets you connect up to three computers for free. Download it by clicking Download Freeware at www.snipca.com/54269.

Install AnyViewer on both your local client and remote host computer. Where some remote-access platforms distinguish between the client and server software, AnyViewer has rolled them both into a single program – so when it's installed on two or more machines you can connect in either direction. Just make sure you're sitting at the computer you want to use to make the connection, and not the one you want to access from a distance.

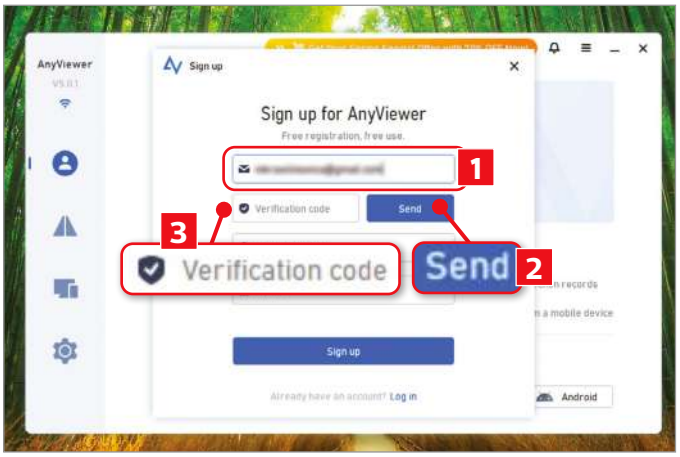
If you want to access a friend's computer and they're in a different location, call them up and ask them to read out the 'device ID' number on the left (1 in our screenshot left). Type that number into the Start Control box 2 on the right of your AnyViewer window, then click Connect 3.

You need authorisation to connect to a remote computer, so choose whether you want to send a connection request, or enter a security code, then click OK. The screenshot above right shows what pops up on our friend's computer (the 'host') when we select 'Send a request to your partner' on our own machine.

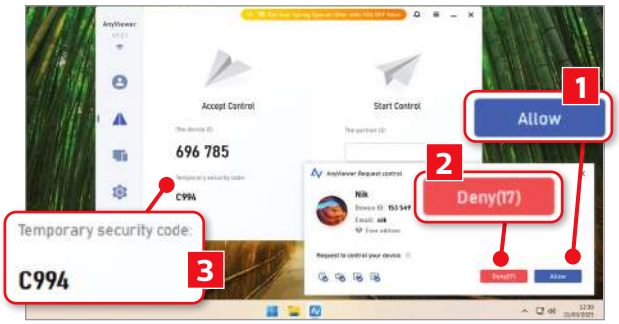


Ask your friend to read the number on the left, then type it into the box on the right

To access one of your own PCs, using AnyViewer, click 'Log in' followed by 'Sign up'...



...then type the code AnyViewer sends you into the 'Verification code' box



Your friend can authorise your connection request by clicking Allow

As you can see, they are asked to authorise the connection, which they can do by clicking Allow 1. If they click nothing, the Deny option will automatically be applied (after 17 seconds in this instance – as you can see from the number in the brackets 2) and our request will expire.

However, there's also a 'Temporary security code' on our friend's screen 3. Had they given us this code as well as the device ID (which we already know), we could instead select 'Input security code' when trying to connect and – when we click OK – we'd be asked to enter the code. As long as we do this accurately, we'll be connected without our friend clicking anything.

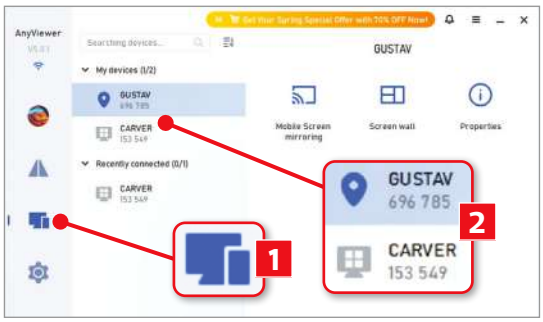
This is fine when you and your friend can both be online at the same time to swap codes, but what if you wanted to use AnyViewer to access one of your own computers, which you're using as a file server or music library? It might be tucked away in a cupboard, and not even have a screen attached.

In that scenario, you'd enrol the computer using an AnyViewer account so you can connect to it whenever you need to without entering codes.

To do so, briefly connect the server (host) machine to a screen, keyboard and mouse. Install AnyViewer on it, then click the 'Log in' icon at the top left (1 in our screenshot top left).

Click 'Sign up' on the following page 2, then enter your email address (1 in our screenshot top right) and click Send 2. This sends a code to the address you just supplied to make sure it's valid. Check your inbox and type the code into the 'Verification code' box 3 before filling in the rest of the form.

Once you've completed the process and your computer is logged in, it will be registered to your AnyViewer account. Now switch to the local (client) machine, click 'Log in' in the sidebar, and this time click the 'Log in' button on the second page. Use the same email address and password as you did when setting up the account and click 'Log in'. You now have two devices registered to your account.



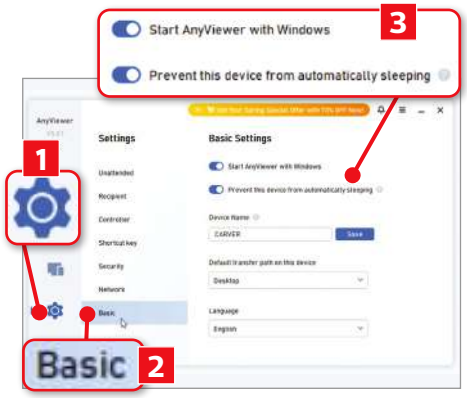
Click the 'Devices' icon, then double-click the computer you want to connect to

Click the 'Devices' icon on the left (1 in our screenshot below) to see all your registered computers. We have two computers on our account, called Gustav and Carver 2. Gustav is highlighted because it's the one we're using. To connect to Carver, all we need to do is double-click it.

Because the connection has already been checked and verified, there's no need to type the codes required when you were connecting outside of your AnyViewer account.

You'll remember that we said remote access relies on having a server running on the host machine, and that AnyViewer combines the server and client programs into a single piece of software. To reliably connect to the remote machine whenever you need to, you'll have to ensure the server is always running.

Click the cog (1 in our screenshot below) on the host machine, then Basic 2, and make sure the two sliders are turned on 3. This makes AnyViewer start when Windows does, and prevents it from sleeping automatically – so it'll stay awake listening for incoming connections.



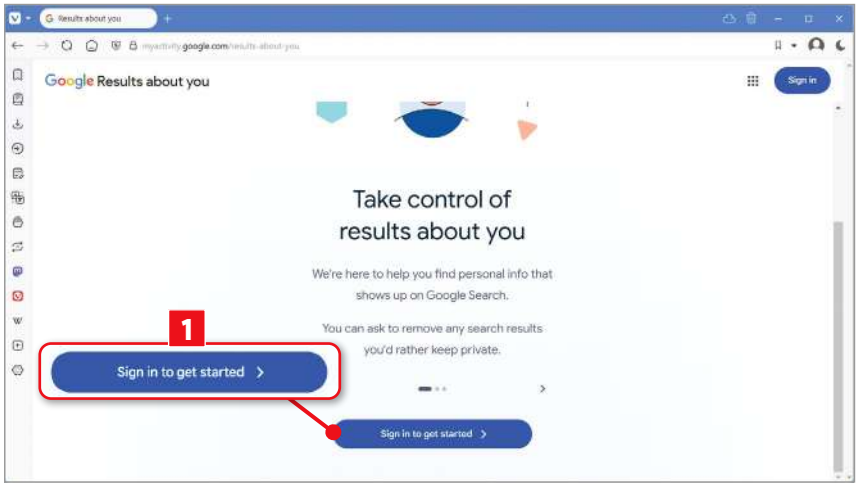
Enable these options to ensure AnyViewer launches on startup and doesn't go to sleep

Remove your personal information from Google search results

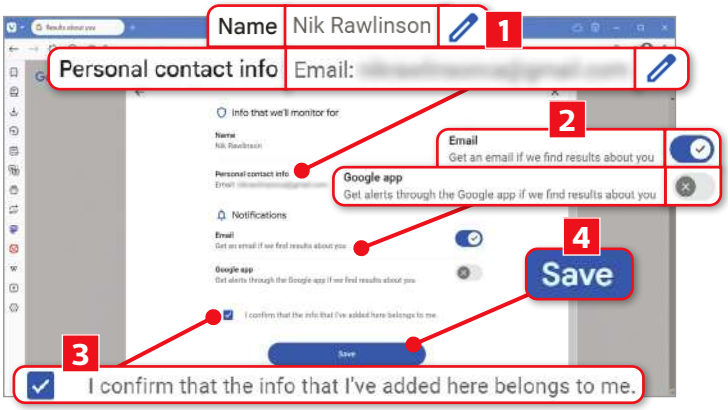
What you need: Google account
Time required: 30 minutes

Data published online can hang around a lot longer than you might imagine. Google has introduced a service for identifying and potentially removing personal information from its search results. When we tried it, it turned up details we'd posted on forums around 15 years ago. Try it for yourself by following the steps outlined here, and you may be equally surprised by what you find. If any there's any personal information you'd like to remove, you can put a request into Google to do so. It's not guaranteed that Google will do as you ask, but it's still worth carrying out the search, as you can use the list it produces to contact site owners directly and request that they remove your data from the relevant pages.

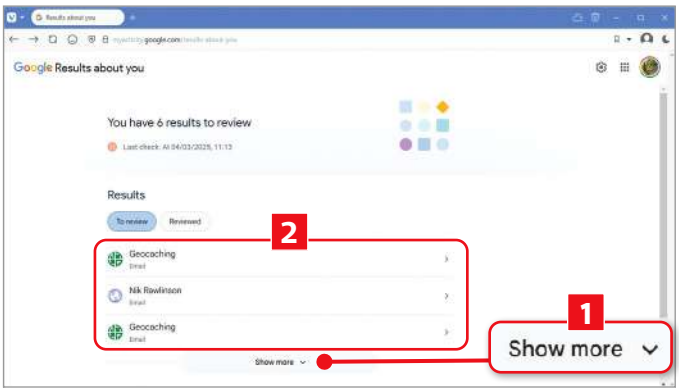
STEP 1 Open a browser and visit the 'Results about you' homepage at www.snipca.com/54116. If you're not already logged into your Google Account, click 'Sign in to get started' 1 and provide your Google credentials. Don't worry if you have multiple Google accounts: you only need to log in once and can provide multiple addresses for checking in subsequent steps, including non-Google accounts and home addresses.


Google Results about you
Sign in
Take control of results about you
We're here to help you find personal info that shows up on Google Search.
You can ask to remove any search results you'd rather keep private.
1
Sign in to get started

STEP 2 A lot of the requested information is optional, but you will need to provide a name to search for. Enter it in the Name box 1 and, if you've been known by any other names, click '+ Add a name' 2 and enter those. When you've provided all the names you want to search for, click Continue. On the following screen, you need to add at least one home address, phone number or email address (or several of each if you want Google to search for multiple pieces of personal data). When you've done that, click Continue.

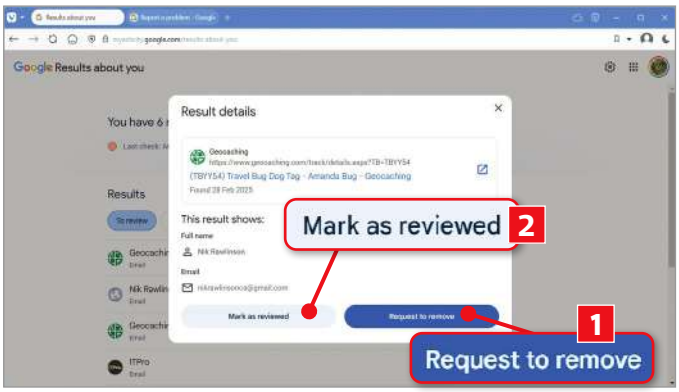


STEP 3 Finally, check that the information you have entered is correct and click the pencils 1 if you need to make an edit. Use the sliders 2 to decide how you want to be notified if Google discovers your personal data in its search results. It will continue checking over time, so emails or notifications could appear periodically. Tick the box 3 at the bottom to confirm that the information you have entered relates to yourself, then click Save 4. Now wait for the first results to appear. Ours arrived the next day.



STEP 4

When we received our notification email (with the subject line 'Your personal info found on Search'), we clicked the 'Review result' button that it contained to see what it had turned up. Clicking 'Show more' 1 on the page that appeared expands the list to include all matching results. Clicking each result individually 2 gave us more details, including which information (that we entered in Step 2) showed up in the search results.

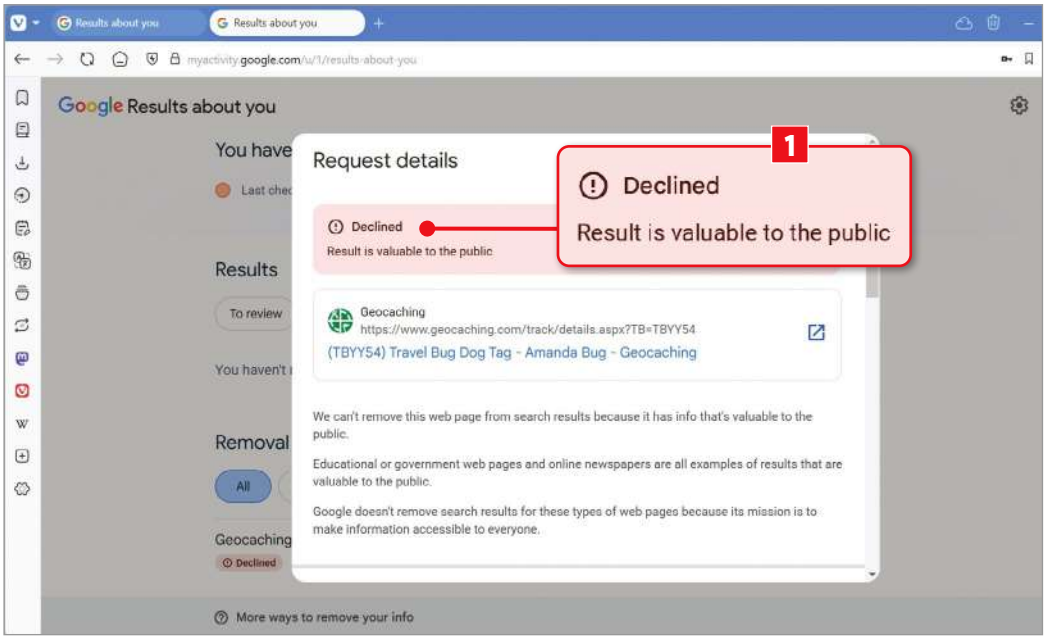


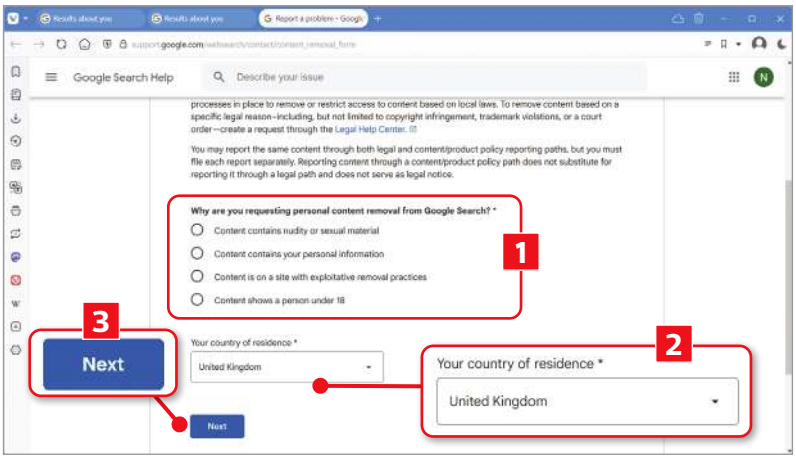
STEP 5

If, having opened a full result, you want to remove one of the matches from Google's database, click 'Request to remove' 1. If you're happy to leave the information in the public domain but want it to show that you've dealt with it, click 'Mark as reviewed' 2. You'll now need to wait again while Google reviews your request and comes back to you with its decision. Again, in our case, this took a day to process. You can put in several requests simultaneously.

STEP 6

Unfortunately, Google denied our request in this instance. When we received its decision in an email with the subject line 'Search result removal update', it provided a 'See details' link which, when clicked, took us to this explanation that the result was 'valuable to the public' 1. If you disagree with this decision, scroll down and click the 'Go to detailed request form' button.


Google Results about you
Request details
1
Declined
Result is valuable to the public
Declined
Result is valuable to the public
Results
To review
Geocaching
https://www.geocaching.com/track/details.aspx?TB=TBYY54
(TBYY54) Travel Bug Dog Tag - Amanda Bug - Geocaching
We can't remove this web page from search results because it has info that's valuable to the public.
Educational or government web pages and online newspapers are all examples of results that are valuable to the public.
Google doesn't remove search results for these types of web pages because its mission is to make information accessible to everyone.
Removal
All
Geocaching
Declined
More ways to remove your info



STEP 7

Click one of the buttons to select the reason for your request 1, then select your country of residence 2 and click Next 3. Now work your way through the rest of the form. It is fairly comprehensive, asking for the data in question, web addresses where the data appears, screenshots, and the addresses of Google Search results pages. If you are still unable to remove the data from Google's database, try contacting the site where it's displayed to have it removed directly. If the site owner agrees, it should eventually disappear from Google search results as the company updates its databases.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Turn off sleep until video downloads finish

I've had some success using 4K Video Downloader Plus (www.snipca.com/53999), which was your main program in Issue 705's Best Free Software (page 18). But around half of the videos I was trying to download would fail halfway through.

I was digging through the program's settings looking for an answer, and found it with the 'Prevent system sleep until downloads are finished' option. I realised then that my downloads were being halted if my computer went to sleep during the process. This setting overrides sleep, and since activating it I've not had a single failed download.

Turn it on by clicking the top-right Preferences icon (a cog) then selecting Advanced on the left (1 in our screenshot) and moving the slider so it turns green 2. I've also turned on the 'Play notification sound' slider in the Notification section, so I get a beep when the download has completed.

Frank Delaney

Frank wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433

HARDWARE

Install new graphics card to upgrade to Windows 11

I had spent months trying to upgrade my PC to Windows 11 with no luck at all, despite it seeming to meet the requirements (such as TPM 2.0). Windows didn't give me any meaningful reason while it kept failing, so I was resigned to having to retire the computer.

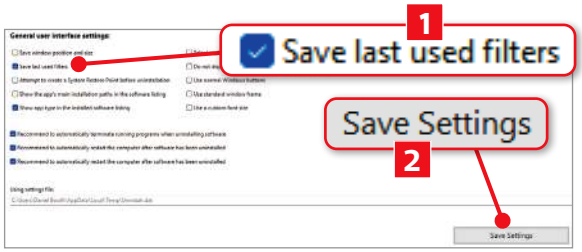
But then I read that some graphics cards simply won't work with Windows 11, and will prevent the upgrade from happening. I took a chance and fitted a more recent card – a second-hand GeForce GT 710 (pictured below left) – and suddenly I was able to upgrade the PC to Windows 11. You can buy the GT 710 brand new for £40 from Amazon (www.snipca.com/54078). Now I just need to find a way of rescuing my laptop too.

Dilwyn Jones

SOFTWARE

Save search filters in Uninstalr

Over the years I've struggled to find a decent tool for quickly uninstalling software, so I decided to give Uninstalr a try after you recommended version 2.6 (www.snipca.com/53830) in Issue 704 (page 18). You're right that its analysis of installed programs takes a while, but it has some useful settings to compensate. For example, click the top-left menu button followed by Settings, then tick 'Save last used filters' (1 in our screenshot above) under the 'General user interface settings' heading. Confirm this change by clicking Save Settings 2. Now, any filters you choose when searching for software will be remembered the next time you open the program.



Des Mooney

Why I stopped using...

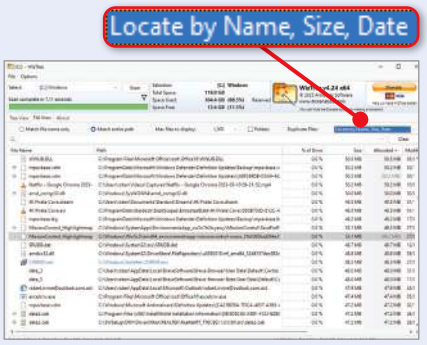
WinDirStat

In Issue 702 (page 19) you recommended the latest version of WinDirStat (2.2.0, www.snipca.com/53501). I was interested because I used the program for many years, but over time – as my 2TB drive became full of videos – it started to slow down.

And what I use instead...

I switched last year to WizTree (www.snipca.com/53811), which you've also praised many times. In fact, I was reassured to see you recommend version 4.24 in Issue 704 (page 19). You mentioned that it now spots more duplicate files, and that's precisely what I've found. I love how it shows duplicates by matching names, sizes and dates (see screenshot).

You also called it "speedy", and that's the main reason I started using it instead of WinDirStat. It only takes seconds to scan my system, while WinDirStat could take minutes. Deleting files is fast too, and it works well on every computer I've installed it on, from an old Windows 7 laptop (which I still use offline) to a shiny new mini PC running Windows 11.



Joss Reynolds

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

Email us your tips: letters@computeractive.co.uk

HARDWARE

Buy a printer potty for waste ink

Way back in May 2021 (Issue 606, page 64) Cheryl Burton raised the issue of the Maintenance Box in Epson's printers. This is the term it uses for the collection tank for waste ink. I have an Epson 1500W printer (www.snipca.com/54110) and have never had a problem with waste ink because as soon as I bought it I fitted it with a Printer Potty (pictured above).

You'll find these on the OctoInkjet website (www.snipca.com/54112), starting at £17.95. They use a sponge pad to divert waste ink away from the maintenance box and into an external container, so you'll never see any warning messages. I've had this printer for over six years and have never had any problems.

Alex Tyrrell

SOFTWARE

Catalogue books quickly using barcode reader

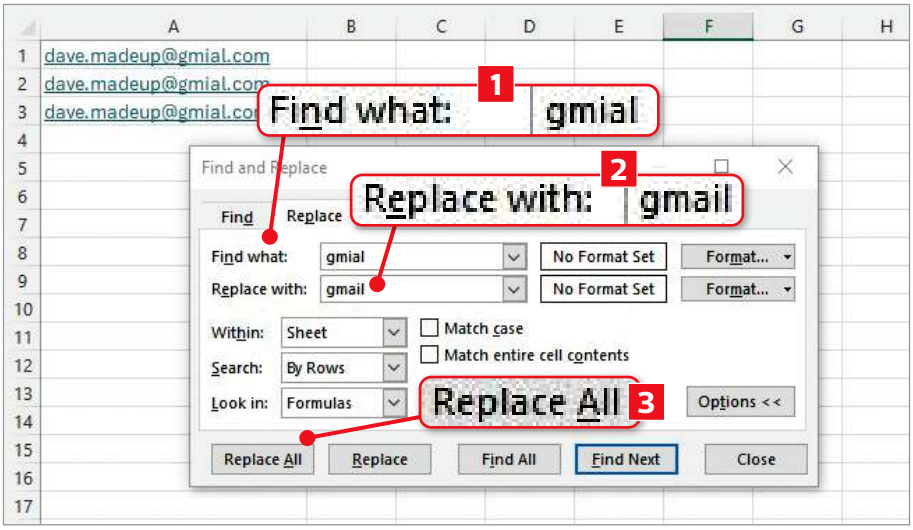
In Issue 704 (page 20) Richard Kelly asked how he could catalogue 1,000 books. I had a similar project over 20 years ago and used the database in Microsoft Works. It was easy to set up and use as a spreadsheet. It had a capacity of 32,000 lines and both a list and form view.

Works is now discontinued so I transferred my information (about 4,000 lines of data at the time) to an Excel spreadsheet (capacity 64,000 lines).

This has lots of filtering options and search facilities to produce reports as required. Text and numbers are obviously straightforward and I have a column for inserting a link to a web-page address if necessary, as well as links to any images or other information.

I'd also suggest buying a barcode reader to quickly input ISBNs. You can find a new USB-wired one on Amazon for £10 (see www.snipca.com/54111, pictured left). It reads the EAN-13 and UPC barcode styles as well as lots more. You can also scan barcodes using Google Lens (https://lens.google).

Chris Adam



OFFICE

Use 'Find & Replace' to replace incorrect spreadsheet text

In Issue 705's Make Office Better (page 47) you have a tip on using the Substitute function to replace text in spreadsheet cells. While this works both in plain text and in formulas the results are displayed in an offset column and doesn't correct the original cells. One would then have to copy and paste values back to the original cells.

There could also be a problem if you wanted to correct items not only in the same column but distributed throughout the spreadsheet. A better way would be to use the Find/Replace tool.

To do this, select the area in question (or press Ctrl+A to select all active cells). Now on the ribbon click 'Find & Select' then click Replace. Type the incorrect spelling in 'Find what' (1 in our screenshot left) and the correct spelling in 'Replace with' 2. Now click 'Replace all' 3.

This converts all incorrect spellings with the correct spelling in text and formulae in the original cells, so you don't need to copy and paste values. There's a similar replace process in Word.

Richard Bale

Reader recommends...

Tecknet Ergonomic Mouse

£17 from www.snipca.com/53556

When I read Robert Irvine's 'Easy When You Know How' in Issue 703 (page 74) about using the Tecknet Ergonomic Mouse, I wondered whether it would solve problems I've had with nerve pains in my ring and little fingers following an accident years ago.

I purchased the Tecknet mouse Robert used for £17.84, in white (as pictured), from Amazon. I started to use it as soon as it arrived and it took me only three days to get used to the new grip. It's brilliantly easy to use, and changing the DPI is simple.

My nerve pains have reduced by about a half and I suspect will decrease further as my hand becomes adjusted to the new position and grip. Thanks Robert for recommending the mouse. Keep up the good work.

Ken Knight

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

Browser Tips

CHROME

Hear content read aloud in Reading Mode

Chrome 134 (released in March) introduces a feature that Edge and Firefox have offered for years – the ability to hear text read aloud when viewing content in its Reading Mode. The option is already available in the Chrome app for Android, and now you can enjoy it in the desktop browser too.

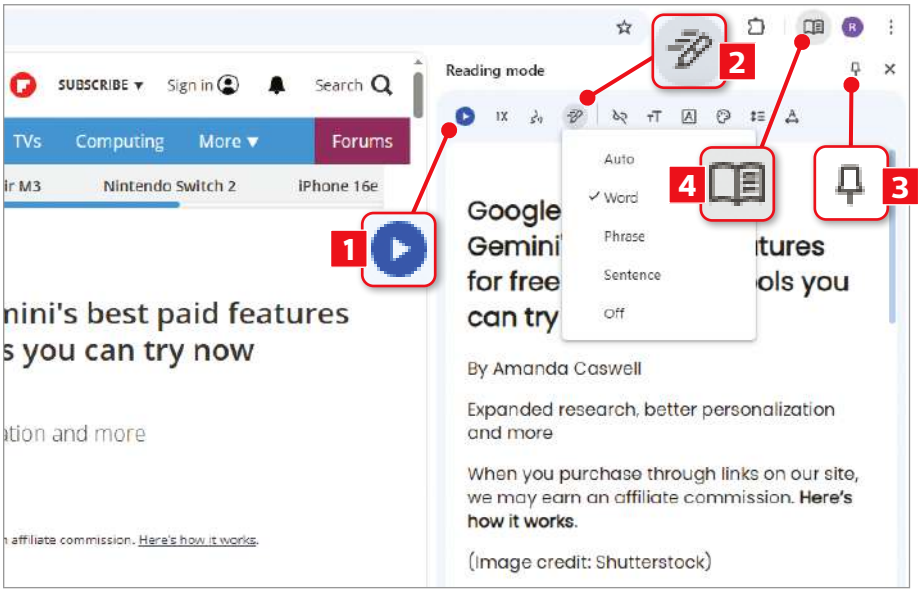
Reading Mode removes everything from web pages except the text and displays the streamlined content in Chrome's side panel. Here you can change the font, size and background colour of the text to make it as easy to read as possible. The new Read Aloud feature lets you listen to it too, by clicking the Play button in the top-left corner of the side panel (1 in our screenshot below).

You can adjust the reading speed to make it up to four times faster, or slow it down, and choose from eight different voices – including the default text-to-speech voice on your PC. Click the highlighter-pen icon 2 to have Read Aloud highlight words, phrases or sentences as it reads them.

To switch to Reading Mode, simply right-click a web page or a highlighted section of text, then choose 'Open in reading mode'. This will open a text-only version of the content in Chrome's side panel, where you can use the new Read Aloud options.

If you don't see them, type chrome://flags in the address bar and press Enter to open the Experiments page. Search for Read Aloud, select Enabled in the dropdown menus for both results and click Relaunch.

For instant access to Reading Mode, click the 'Pin to toolbar' icon 3 in the top-right corner of the side panel. This adds a 'Reading mode' button 4 to the browser's toolbar, which you can click to open and close the feature.



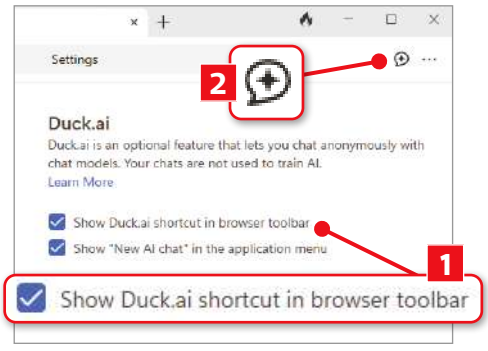
DUCKDUCKGO

Access Duck.ai from the toolbar

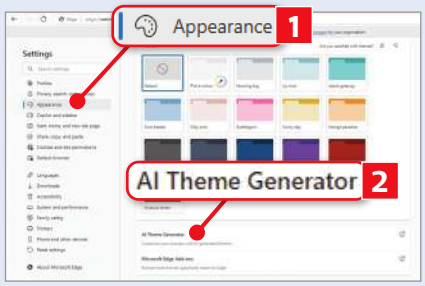
In our 'Complete Guide to AI' feature in Issue 706, we recommended Duck.ai, which lets you interact anonymously with popular AI chatbots. DuckDuckGo has now integrated the feature into its browser for Windows (www.snipca.com/54200), giving you instant access to Duck.ai wherever you are on the web.

Just click the browser's three-dot menu button and choose 'New AI chat' to open Duck.ai in a new tab. You can also add a shortcut to DuckDuckGo's toolbar. To do so, choose 'Settings' in the main menu, select Duck.ai and tick the box 'Show Duck.ai shortcut in browser toolbar' (1 in our screenshot below).

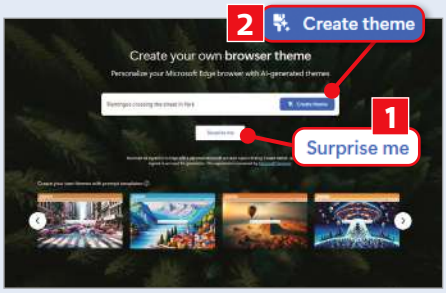
A speech-bubble icon 2 will now appear next to the menu button, which you can click to open Duck.ai. To remove the shortcut, right-click it and choose 'Hide Duck.ai shortcut'.


Settings
Duck.ai
Duck.ai is an optional feature that lets you chat anonymously with chat models. Your chats are not used to train AI.
Learn More
Show Duck.ai shortcut in browser toolbar
Show "New AI chat" in the application menu
1
2
Show Duck.ai shortcut in browser toolbar

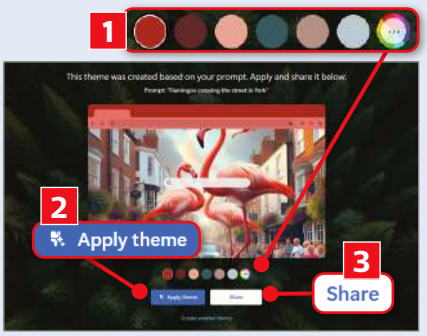
WORKSHOP Create your own themes for Edge using AI



1 Click Edge's three-dot menu button and choose Settings, then Appearance 1. In the 'Customise appearance' section, select the option AI Theme Generator 2 to open the tool's website in a new browser tab.



2 Describe the theme you want to apply to Edge or click 'Surprise me' 1 to generate a random one. You can also choose and modify one of the suggested prompts. Click the 'Create theme' button 2 to continue.



3 Once your theme has been generated, you can customise the colour of the toolbars using the options 1 below the main image. Click 'Apply theme' 2 to add it to Edge, and Share 3 to download it to your PC.

BEST EXTENSION FOR... Locking your browser

SecureTab
Chromium
www.snipca.com/54195

Your online privacy can be threatened by people around you, especially if you share your computer or use it in a public place. SecureTab protects your browser with a password when you step away for a few minutes, without you needing to lock your whole PC. Once you've set a password, click the extension's toolbar button and choose Lock Browser (see screenshot) – or press Ctrl+Shift+L. This will instantly lock all browser tabs, so they can only be accessed with the password you set.

You can also set SecureTab to lock tabs automatically after five minutes of inactivity. If a determined nosy parker uninstalls the extension, all the tabs will be closed to foil them. SecureTab may prompt an Enhanced Safe Browsing warning, but it's safe to use so click 'Continue to install'.

If you don't like that, try...
BrowserLock
www.snipca.com/54198

BrowserLock offers extra options such as specifying how long to lock your browser. But you need to sign up for an account.

FIREFOX
Delete form data without wiping your history

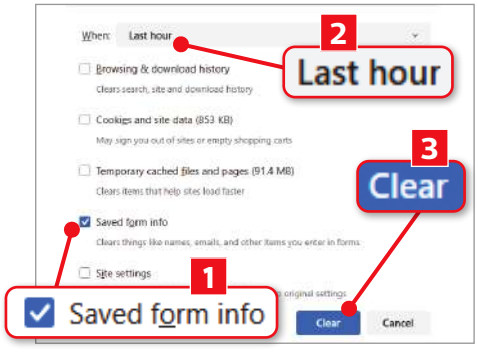
One of the many improvements in Firefox 136 (released early March – see Issue 706, page 18) is its Clear History feature. Previously, whenever you wanted to delete information that you'd entered in online forms, then saved in the browser – such as your name, phone number and address – you needed to wipe your entire browsing history.

The updated feature provides separate options for deleting saved-form data and your browsing history, so you can clear one or the other. To do so, click Firefox's three-line menu button and choose Settings then 'Privacy & Security'. Scroll down to the History section and click the Clear History button.

In the window that opens, select the data you want to wipe and deselect what you want to keep, such as 'Browsing & download history', 'Cookies and site data' and the new 'Saved form info' option (1 in our screenshot below).

You can also specify a time range, such as 'Last hour' 2, 'Last four hours' or 'Since 12:00AM' – or simply choose Everything. Click the Clear button 3 to delete the selected data from Firefox.

To stop the browser saving form information in the first place, click the 'Firefox will' menu in the History section and select 'Use custom settings for history'. Untick the box for 'Remember search and form history'.

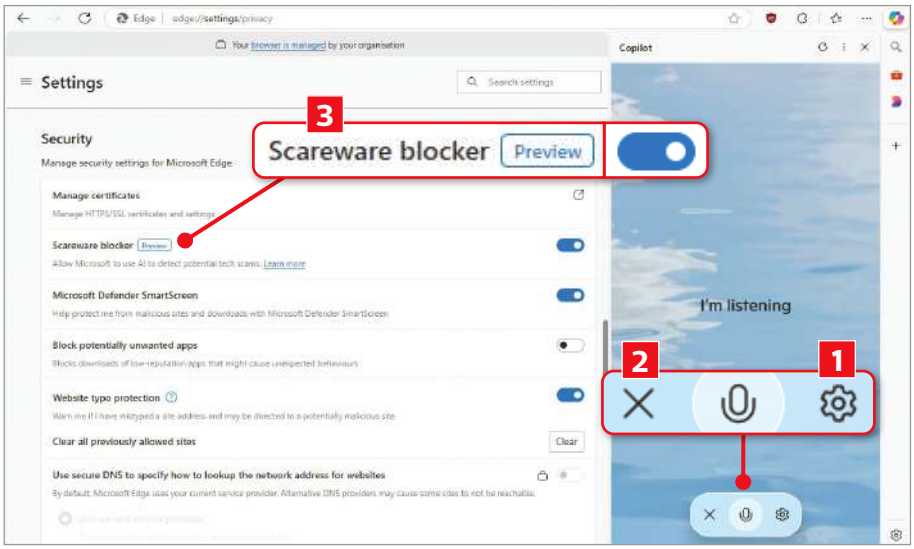


EDGE
Speak to Copilot and block scareware scams

After a series of underwhelming updates, Edge 134 (released in March) brings some interesting new features to Microsoft's browser. Unsurprisingly, most are powered by AI.

As we mentioned in our 'Complete Guide to AI' Cover Feature in Issue 706, Microsoft's AI assistant Copilot now has a Voice mode, so you can chat without typing. The new option is also available in the version of Copilot built into Edge.

Click the Copilot button to open its side panel, then click the 'Talk to Copilot' (microphone) button to the right of the message box. You can change voices by clicking the 'Voice settings' cog (1 in our screenshot above) – our favourite is Wave, which speaks in a natural-sounding English accent. Click the 'Stop talking' (X) button 2 to end your conversation and view a transcript.



Another new AI feature is Edge's 'Scareware blocker', which uses machine learning to identify and block 'scareware' scams. These usually take the form of full-screen pop-ups that claim your PC's security has been compromised, and try to scare you into calling fake tech-support numbers or downloading malware.

To enable this new security option, click Edge's three-dot menu button and choose Settings, then 'Privacy, search and services'. Scroll down to the Security section and switch on 'Scareware blocker' 3. Note that it's still a 'preview' so may not be completely reliable.

Edge has also integrated a Microsoft Designer-powered feature, which lets you design custom themes for the browser using AI. See our Workshop opposite to learn how it works.

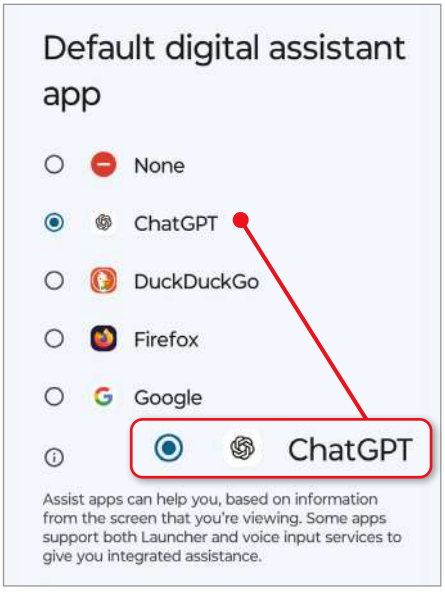
Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Set ChatGPT as your default voice assistant

Google Assistant has long been the default voice assistant on Android devices, but – as we explained in our 'Complete Guide to AI' Cover Feature in Issue 706 – it's being replaced by Google's AI tool Gemini. You now also have the option to make ChatGPT your default digital assistant, if you prefer OpenAI's tool to either of Google's.

Provided you have the ChatGPT app (www.snipca.com/54204) installed on your Android phone or tablet, the change is easy to apply. Open the Settings app and tap Apps followed by 'Default apps'.


Default digital assistant app
None
ChatGPT
DuckDuckGo
Firefox
Google
ChatGPT
Assist apps can help you, based on information from the screen that you're viewing. Some apps support both Launcher and voice input services to give you integrated assistance.

Select 'Digital assistant app' then 'Default digital assistant app' and select ChatGPT (see screenshot below left). Press 'OK' to grant the assistant the required permissions.

You can now launch ChatGPT by long-pressing the Home button on your device and interact with the chatbot using Voice mode. However, unlike Google Assistant or Gemini, it can't control system settings or perform tasks such as playing music, and saying "Hey Google" will still trigger one of those tools.

If you don't want to use ChatGPT, you can instead combine Google Assistant and Gemini features to give you the best of both worlds. Open the Gemini app for Android (www.snipca.com/54221), tap your profile picture and choose Settings. Select 'Google Assistant features in Gemini' and switch on 'Use Google Assistant features'. These features include managing smart-home devices and getting personalised information from Google apps.

On an iPhone or iPad, you can't replace Apple's Siri assistant with ChatGPT, but it's possible to combine them – provided your device is running iOS 18.2 or later and supports Apple Intelligence.

Open the Settings app and tap 'Apple Intelligence & Siri' then ChatGPT. Press 'Set Up' and choose whether to use ChatGPT with or without an account. Siri will now source information through ChatGPT to answer your questions.

ANDROID & iOS

Search across your tabs in Chrome

Google has updated its Chrome mobile browser with a long overdue tab-search option. This means you can now search the titles of all the tabs you have open, when you want to return to a specific page.

To use the feature, open the tab switcher by pressing the square containing a number (which indicates the number of open tabs) in the top-right corner of the browser. Here you'll see a new 'Search your tabs' box at the top of the screen (see screenshot right). Start typing your search query to view tabs containing matching words in their titles. The results will be listed under 'Last open tabs' (in the Chrome app for Android) or 'Open tabs' (on iOS).

In Chrome for Android, the search feature goes even deeper by finding matching pages in your Bookmarks and History, which you can tap to reopen. The new tab-search option is also available in Chrome's Incognito mode.

BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

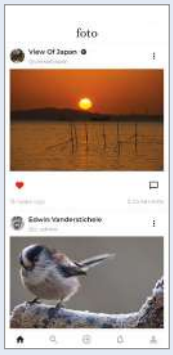
Foto

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/54206

iOS www.snipca.com/54207

Foto is a new alternative to Instagram, aimed at photographers who are tired of the clutter in Meta's app. It lets you share uncropped photos, follow other users to view their shots and search for images with specific subjects such as aircraft, wildlife or sunsets. There are no ads or videos, but premium features require a subscription.



Now

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/54209

iOS www.snipca.com/54210

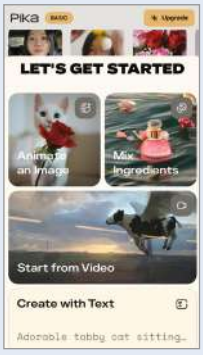
Sky's streaming service Now has redesigned its mobile app to make it easier to browse its TV shows, films and sport coverage. Along with an improved menu system and search tool, the app now includes a list of the top 10 most popular shows and lets you stream directly from the TV guide. You can also set up profiles for kids.

Pika

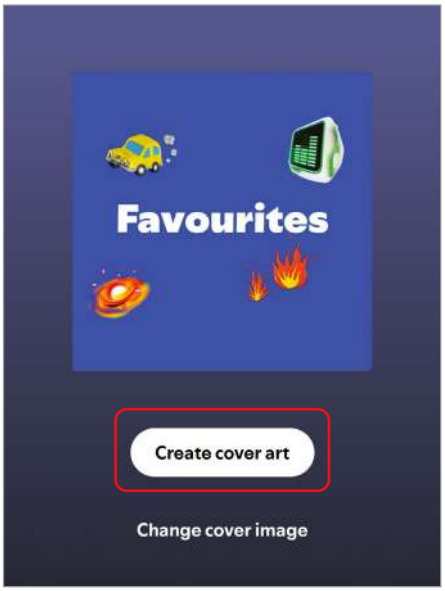
Free*

iOS www.snipca.com/54214

This amazing AI video generator makes it easy to create high-quality clips on your iPhone or iPad (there's no Android version yet). You can turn text descriptions into videos, animate still images, edit existing videos, apply creative effects and much more. Pika gives you 150 free credits a month, with paid-for plans starting at £7.99.



*Contains in-app purchases



ANDROID & iOS

Create your own artwork for Spotify playlists

Spotify now lets you design your own artwork for playlists, rather than stick with its default grid of album covers. This is to make your playlists "look as good as they sound".

To try the new option, open a playlist, tap the three-dot icon and select 'Create cover art'. Choose 'Create cover art' (see screenshot above) on the following screen to play around with different design elements. For example, you can customise the size, style and presentation of the text in the playlist's title; upload an image or take a photo with your camera; and apply various stickers to the playlist's artwork. Tap 'Save' when done.

Alternatively, skip the customisation and just choose 'Change cover image' to select a suitable picture. You can restore the original playlist image by choosing 'Remove photo'.

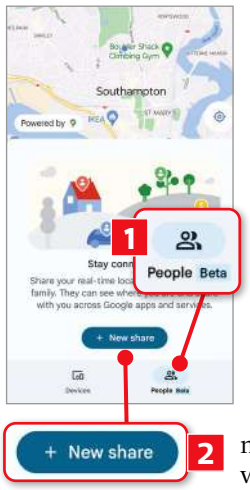
The new cover-art feature is available to all free and Premium users of the Spotify mobile app.

ANDROID

Share your location in Find My Device

Apple's Find My app for iPhones and iPads includes a useful People option, which lets you share your current location with friends and family, and vice versa. Google has now added a similar feature to its Find My Device app for Android (www.snipca.com/54215), to complement the options for locating lost phones, tablets, accessories and tracker tags.

To share your location, open Find My Device and sign into your Google account. Tap the new 'People (Beta)' tab in the app's bottom toolbar (1 in our screenshot right) and press 'New share' 2. Select the contact you want to share your location with and choose how long to share it for – one hour, today only, a custom length of time or until you turn sharing off. Tap 'Share' to start sharing – or choose 'Share link' to send a link instead. Turn on Location Sharing if prompted.



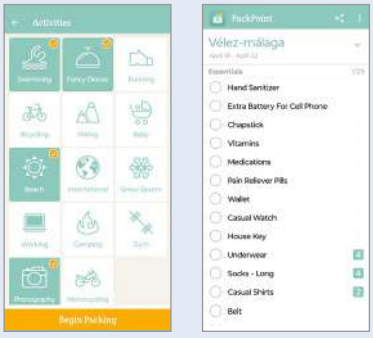
The other person will now be able to track your location in their Find My Device app or Google Maps. Likewise, you can track them via the 'Sharing with you' section of the People tab or Maps. You can stop sharing your whereabouts at any time.

Google has also updated the Devices tab in Find My Devices, so that it instantly shows the location of your main phone or tablet on a map when you open the app.

BEST APPS FOR... Managing your luggage

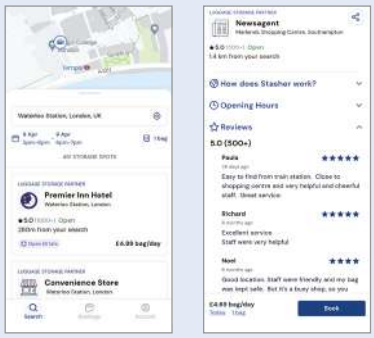
PackPoint

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/54228
iOS www.snipca.com/54229
If you often pack too much or too little when you go away for a short break or a long trip, PackPoint can help. Specify your gender, destination, length of trip and planned activities and the app will generate a packing list of items you should take. You can add and remove items as required, and share your list with your fellow travellers.
Best For Packing your suitcase



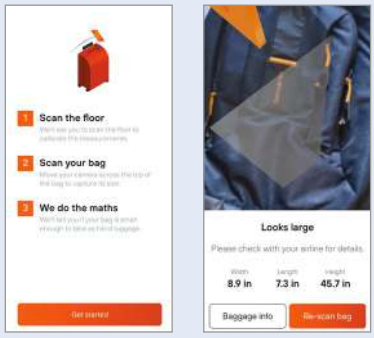
Stasher Luggage Storage

Free
Android www.snipca.com/54226
iOS www.snipca.com/54227
Stasher finds you nearby places to store your luggage while travelling. It has thousands of vetted 'stashpoints' in more than 80 countries, including in shops, hotels and restaurants. Just choose a date and time, and the number of bags you want to stash, to view available storage spots, read user reviews and book directly through the app.
Best For Finding luggage storage



Kayak

Free
Android www.snipca.com/54233
iOS www.snipca.com/54232
Flying with a cabin bag rather than hold luggage saves you money, but most airlines have strict policies on size. The Kayak app includes a handy 'Measure your bag' tool that uses augmented reality to calculate the dimensions (though not the weight) of your hand luggage and tell you whether it's small enough to take on the plane.
Best For Avoiding baggage fees



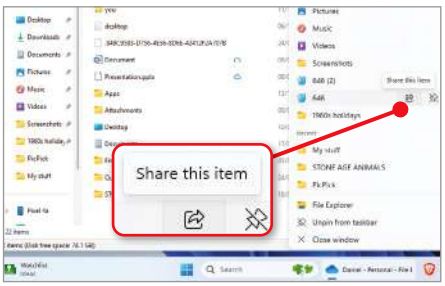
*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11

Share files from an app's jump list

Microsoft's Windows 11 KB5053598 update, released on 11 March, adds the option to share files when you right-click an app's icon on the taskbar. First, pin an app to the taskbar by right-clicking it and selecting 'Pin to taskbar'. Next, right-click the icon to bring up the app's jump list, then hover over the file you want to share and click the 'Share this item' icon (see screenshot below).

Now choose how you want to share it – by email, Phone Link, Nearby Sharing, WhatsApp, OneDrive and so on. It only works with apps that have the option to share files, such as File Explorer, Microsoft Word and Snipping Tool.

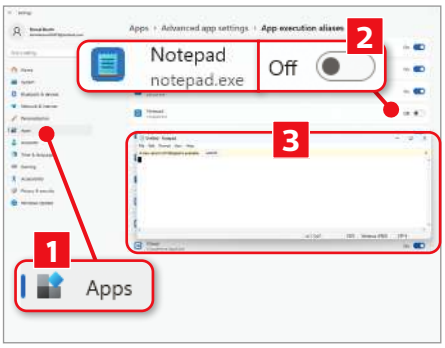


WINDOWS 11

Go back to the old Notepad

Microsoft 365 subscribers can now use the AI-powered Rewrite feature in Notepad (see www.snipca.com/54234). It's the latest change to Notepad, following design tweaks to match Windows 11's style.

If you don't like these changes you can revert to the old Notepad. First, press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Apps on the left (1 in our screenshot below). Now click 'Advanced app settings' followed by 'App execution aliases'. Scroll down to Notepad then turn off the slider 2. Now press Windows key+R, then type notepad and press OK. The old Notepad will now appear 3.



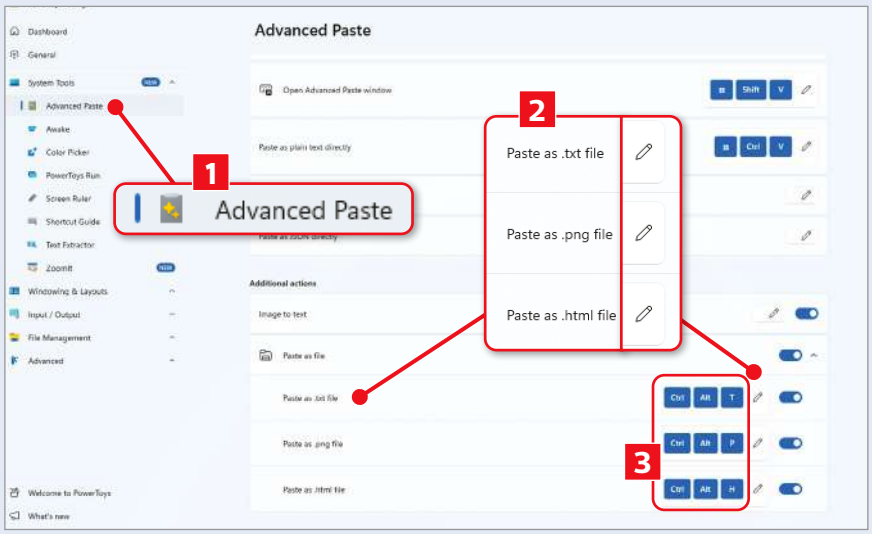
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Set keyboard shortcuts for pasting in different formats

Microsoft's main changes to version 0.89 of PowerToys, released in March, involve the Advanced Paste tool, which pastes content you copy to your clipboard in the format of your choice (see Issue 706, page 19). You can make it easier to paste in specific formats by setting keyboard shortcuts within the tool.

Open PowerToys (install it from www.snipca.com/54179 if you've not yet done so), then click System Tools on the left followed by Advanced Paste (1 in our screenshot). Make sure the blue 'Enable Advanced Paste' slider is enabled on the right, then scroll to the 'Additional actions' heading at the bottom.

Now click the pencil icons next to the 'Paste as' commands for .txt, .png and .html 2 and press the keys you want to use for each command followed by Save. Note that only shortcuts starting with Windows key, Ctrl, Alt or Shift are allowed. When done, you'll see your shortcuts as blue buttons 3.



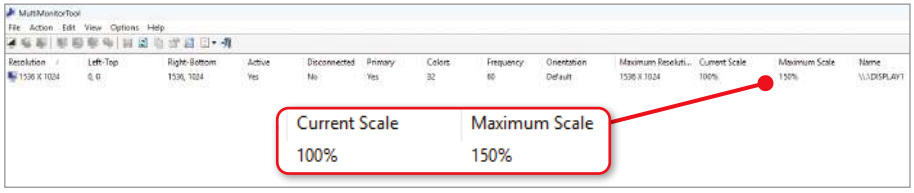
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Check your monitors' current and maximum scales

NirSoft has added Current and Maximum Scale columns to its program MultiMonitorTool, showing you the current scaling of each monitor you use, and the maximum they can handle.

Current scaling is handy when you're switching between monitors that have different resolutions because you can check whether the text and icons are the right size. Maximum scaling is useful when using monitors with a high DPI, like a 4K model, because you'll see if your screen can handle a larger-scaling setting, like 150 or 200 per cent.

Visit www.snipca.com/54238 then scroll down and click either the 32bit or 64bit download link under the Feedback heading. Launch the program, clicking 'More info' then 'Run anyway' if Windows shows a warning. You'll see the new columns to the right at the top (see screenshot below). To change scale settings in Windows, search for and open 'Display settings'.



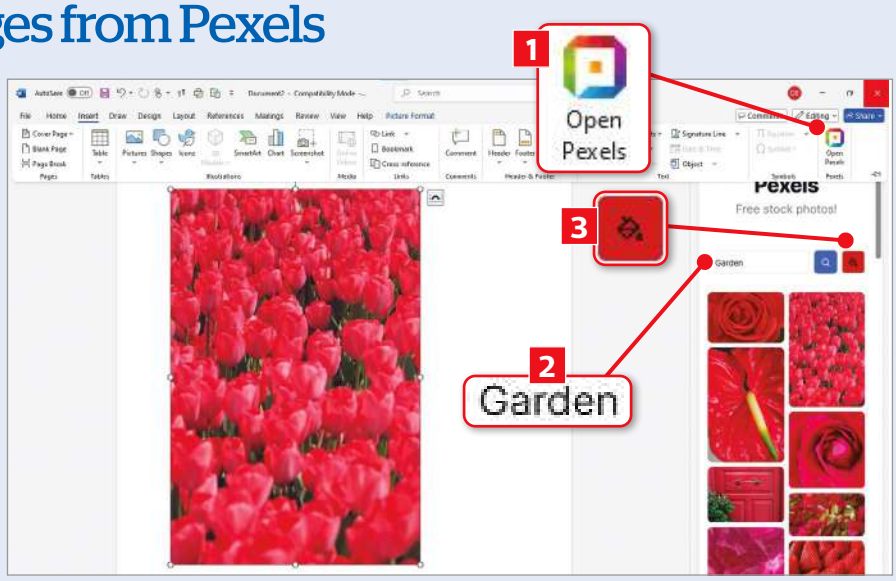
MICROSOFT OFFICE

Add free stock images from Pexels

If you regularly need to add images to documents, presentations or spreadsheets, consider using the Pexels add-in. This provides access to Pexels (www.pexels.com), one of the best sites for free stock pictures (though it doesn't provide any news photos).

Click 'File' at the top left followed by 'Get Add-ins', then search for Pexels. Click the blue Add button next to the search result then tick the 'terms and conditions' box and click Continue. Now click Insert, then Open Pexels (1 in our screenshot) at the far right.

Next, type what you want to find in Pexels 2 then press Enter. You can also choose a colour by clicking the paint-tin button 3.



Click the photo you want to add, then select a size and click Insert Photo. It will then appear on the left where your cursor is positioned.

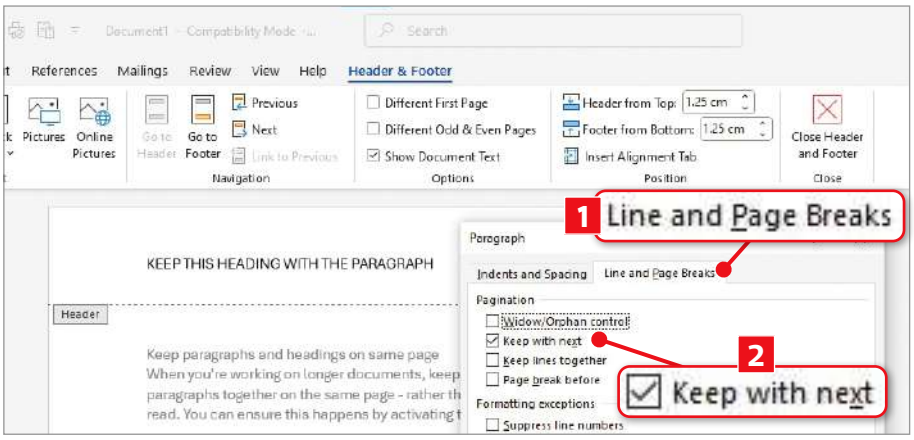
MICROSOFT WORD

Keep paragraphs and headings on same page

When you're working on longer documents, keeping headings and their corresponding paragraphs together on the same page – rather than split over two – makes your content easier to read. You can ensure this happens by activating the 'Keep with next' option.

In Microsoft Word, select the relevant heading, then right-click it and choose Paragraph. Now click the 'Line and Page Breaks' tab (1 in our screenshot below) then tick 'Keep with next' 2 under Pagination. Click OK to confirm.

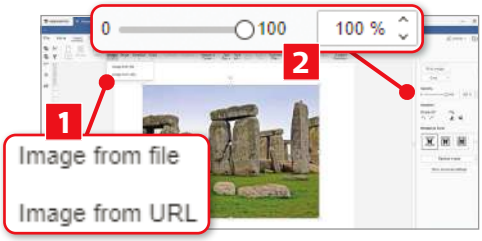
In LibreOffice Writer, select the heading, then right-click it and hover over Paragraph, then click Paragraph. Now click the Text Flow tab and tick 'Keep with next paragraph' under the Split Options heading. Click OK to confirm.



ONLYOFFICE

Change the transparency levels of images

OnlyOffice 8.3.0, released in February, lets you change the transparency of images. It works in the same way across all its tools. To add an image, click Insert at the top, then Image followed by 'Image from file' or 'Image from URL' (1 in our screenshot below left). Now click to select it, then move the Opacity slider on the right from its default of 100 per cent 2. The image's transparency will change as you do so.

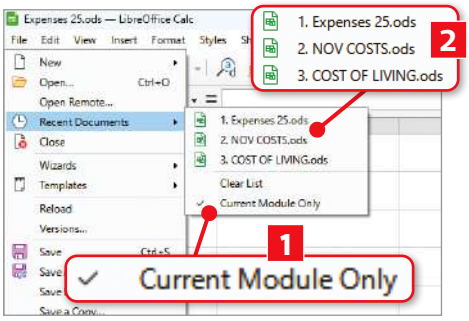


LIBREOFFICE

Only see recent documents from the tool you're in

February's release of LibreOffice 25.2 adds the option to see recent documents only in the tool you've currently got open. So, if you're in Calc, for example, you'll see previous spreadsheets you've had open, but nothing from LibreOffice's other tools (or 'modules'), such as Writer documents or Impress presentations.

Click 'File' at the top left, then Recent Documents and click Current Module Only (1 in our screenshot below). We've done that in Calc so that the only documents shown above are spreadsheets 2.



In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Add survey answers to Google Sheets

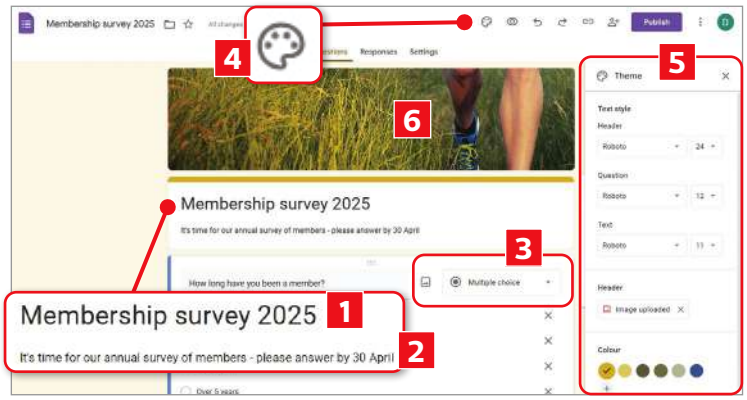
You can link Google Forms with Sheets so that answers to club surveys automatically appear in a spreadsheet. There are plenty of settings for customising your form, as we'll explain. And you can do this in a personal Google account, without paying for Google Workspace.

Create and customise your form

Open Google Drive (https://drive.google.com) then click '+ New' at the top left and hover your cursor over the arrow at the right of Google Forms. Now select a blank form, a blank quiz or a form template (the latter includes helpful forms like contact information and event registration).

For our purposes of creating a survey we'll choose a blank form. Do the same and you'll see an 'Untitled form'. Type over this with the title of your survey (1 in our screenshot above right), then write a brief description below 2. Now type your first question in the 'Untitled Question' box.

The default answer type is multiple choice, which is what we've stuck with. Type your first answer in the 'Option 1' box then press Enter and an 'Option 2' box will appear. Repeat this until you've added all your answer options. Click 'Add other' at the end to let respondents fill in their own answer.



Add your questions then customise your form with fonts, colours and images

The dropdown menu on the right 3 gives you more answer options, including short and long (paragraph) written answers, and boxes to tick. If a question has to be answered, select Required at the bottom. At any time you can press Ctrl+Z to undo your last edit.

Also click the 'Customise theme' icon at the top 4 for options to change the font and colour of the form 5. You can add an image above the title by clicking Choose Image and selecting it. Our questions are for a walking club, so we've picked a suitable image 6.

Link your form and send it to members

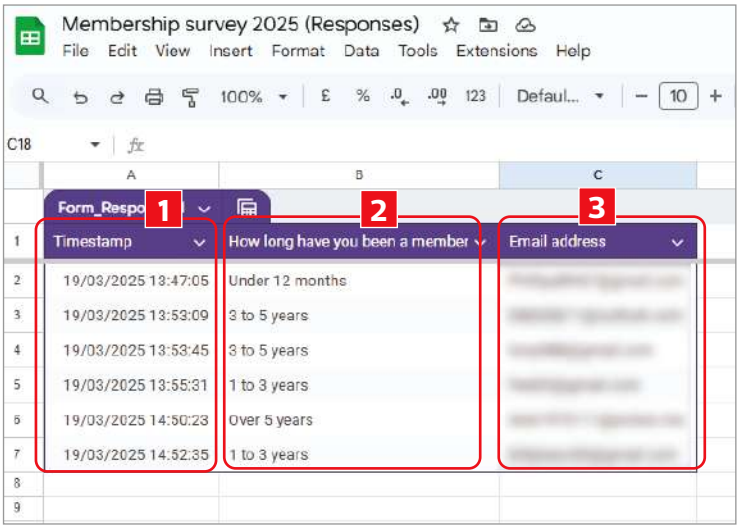
Once you've finished, you're ready to link your form to Google Sheets. Click the Responses tab at the top of your form then 'Link to Sheets'. Now click 'Create a new spreadsheet' followed by Create. Alternatively, choose 'Select existing spreadsheet' to add it to a spreadsheet you've already created.

We'll return to the spreadsheet later. First, return to your survey, then click Settings at the top. Now click the 'Collect email addresses' dropdown menu and choose 'Responder input'. This forces members to add their email when answering your questions, making them appear in your spreadsheet.

Now click Publish at the top right of your form, followed by Manage, then add the email addresses of members you're sending the survey to. Click the Share button then 'Publish and notify'. You can also add a message if you like. Your members will receive an email asking them to complete the survey.

Google has no problem sending forms to Gmail addresses, but it sometimes fails with other email services – showing an 'internal error' message. This is a common bug that's been reported online (www.snipca.com/54260). If you get this error, click the 'Copy responder link' (link) icon instead at the top right then tick Copy. Tick the 'Shorten URL' box if you want it smaller. Now email this link to your members.

Your members' answers will be recorded in the spreadsheet created earlier. There's a 'Timestamp' tab (1 in our screenshot left) showing when they answered, and each question has its own tab with the answers below 2. There's also a tab showing the respondents' email addresses 3.



Your linked spreadsheet will show how and when your members answered

Next issue: Use Mail Merge to send club certificates

What's All the Fuss About...

JPEG XL

Microsoft has made this format easier to use despite Google's resistance

What is it?

A new image format (.jxl) that supports both lossy and lossless file compression, making it extremely versatile.

What's the difference between lossy and lossless?

It comes down to how much image data is lost during compression. The lossy method shrinks files smaller than lossless, meaning you can store more files and share them faster, but it sacrifices some image quality in the process. Lossless keeps files larger, but it doesn't lose any data, preserving every detail when restoring the image.

Does that mean lossless is always better?

Well, it always produces a better image, but it may not always be the best compression for your needs. For example, because lossy shrinks files smaller, it might be preferable when the size of your files is more important than perfect quality – such as when you need to share or store hundreds of them, or create images for websites that need to load quickly. In contrast, lossless is more suitable for fewer images that need to be high quality. Like so many decisions in technology, it's a trade-off.

Will JPEG XL replace JPEG?

That's what its developers hope. It's definitely a huge improvement because JPEG supports lossy only, making it less flexible than formats that support both, like Apple's HEIC and Google's WebP. What's really impressive about JPEG XL is that it's better than JPEG even when converting lossy files. It can make them 60-per-cent smaller at a similar quality. In addition, it can convert images much faster than both HEIC and WebP, and shrink files smaller. It also beats lossless-only formats like PNG too.

> JPEG XL can convert images much faster than both HEIC and WebP, and shrink files smaller

Sounds great. So why aren't we all using it?

Blame Google, which dropped support in Chrome in 2022. It claimed there were "no significant benefits" over existing formats like WebP and AVIF, which it financially backs alongside Amazon, Netflix and Microsoft. This decision also means it doesn't work in browsers based on Chromium, like Brave, Edge and Opera. In Firefox you need to install an extension: www.snipca.com/54282.

Is Google correct?

Not really. It's true that WebP and AVIF load faster online, but JPEG XL is more powerful overall. It shrinks images up to 20-per-cent smaller than AVIF while maintaining quality, and converts old JPEGs without losing data. It also converts high-definition images faster. Many critics argue Google's decision was less about technology and more about promoting formats it controls. And one company at least hasn't given up on it: Microsoft.

Download this plug-in to view JPEG XL files in Windows 11

Does that mean you can use it in Windows?

Yes, and it was made easier in March when Microsoft launched the JPEG XL Image Extension plug-in for Windows 11 on its store (www.snipca.com/54245, pictured below left). Before that, you had to install programs like Paint.NET or GIMP to open JPEG XL files.

So what does the new plug-in do?

It makes your computer read JPEG XL files, letting you see thumbnails in File Explorer and set them as your desktop wallpaper. However, for now the only Windows program that opens them is Media Player Legacy – which you can find on your computer by searching. And you can't yet edit or save them – you'll still need third-party software for that.

Is there any point installing it then?

We think so. Microsoft says support for more Windows programs is "coming", which hopefully means the Photos app. When that happens, you'll probably be able to convert JPEG files to JPEG XL without downloading software. You might as well get prepared. If you don't, it'll be your lossy.

WHO'S AT YOUR DOOR?

From deterring burglars to ensuring packages are safely delivered, a video doorbell has many benefits. Robert Irvine explains why you should buy one and which device to choose

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Receive phone alerts when someone's at your door
- Monitor movement on your doorstep 24 hours a day
- Watch and speak to unexpected visitors remotely
- Get notified as soon as packages are delivered
- Set 'motion zones' to limit the number of alerts
- Make your doorbell's rechargeable battery last longer

It's nearly 10 years since Ring launched the first video doorbell in the UK. Back then, they seemed like an ostentatious gimmick, installed by people who wanted to draw *more* attention to their luxury homes than to stop them being robbed. There were also concerns they could be used to spy on passers-by.

Nowadays, video doorbells are almost as familiar a sight as the traditional 'ding-dong' chime style, and at least one of your neighbours probably has one. But if you've never been tempted to buy one, figuring that you're perfectly capable of answering the door, you may not realise what you're missing out on.

Equally, you may have already bought a Ring doorbell, but been put off using it after Amazon hiked the price of its Ring Home (formerly Ring Protect) subscription last year. Thankfully, there are lots of other smart doorbells to choose from.

In this feature, we explain the benefits of getting a video doorbell for your front door, highlight their most useful options and reveal how to unlock the full potential of these handy home-security devices. We also recommend the best doorbells you can currently buy from trustworthy brands, which won't rip you off with hidden fees. Many give you the choice of wiring them into your existing doorbell setup or using them wirelessly.

6 REASONS YOU MUST BUY A VIDEO DOORBELL

1 Strengthen your home security

The very presence of a video doorbell is enough to deter many would-be burglars, thieves and vandals. Home intruders often knock on the door or ring the bell before they break in, so the risk of being caught on camera may make them think twice.

A video doorbell alerts you when motion is detected at your front door and captures evidence of potential criminal activity. This tells you – and the police – exactly when and how it happened, and helps identify the perpetrator.

Most devices have a 'night vision' feature (pictured above right) that enables them to stream and record clear footage in low light or dark conditions using infrared technology. Some doorbells can even do so in colour.

The police treat doorbell recordings in the same way as any other security camera, and encourage the public to provide it to aid their investigations. Footage has been used in cases ranging from flytipping (www.snipca.com/54300) to murder, and helped secure thousands of convictions.

Video doorbells use night vision for reliable surveillance after dark

2 Protect your package deliveries

Video doorbells also discourage so-called 'porch pirates' – thieves who target packages left on doorsteps. If they're bold or stupid enough to try anyway, you'll know who they are.

Better still, you can prevent packages from being left unattended (or undelivered) in the first place, by speaking to the person delivering it directly via the doorbell (pictured below). Tell them you're not home and to leave the item in a safe place or with a neighbour, or to redeliver it at a more convenient time. Some video doorbells alert you when a package is delivered, even if no one presses their buttons.

Use your video doorbell to tell couriers where to leave packages

3 Screen visitors from anywhere

Being able to see who's at the door without answering it is undoubtedly the biggest benefit of a video doorbell. This means you can avoid dealing with unexpected and unwanted callers, and verify who people are before you open the door to them.

Access your doorbell from other smart devices, like the Echo Show

You can even handle visitors when you're not home by using your doorbell's remote-monitoring feature. Just open the app on your phone or tablet to see who's at the door, tell them when you'll be back or keep an eye on them until they leave.

4 Monitor your family and pets

Video doorbells offer a convenient way to keep track of your own family's movements, especially older and infirm relatives. They tell you precisely when someone entered or left the house or flat, so you can be reassured they got home safely or take action if they leave the door open.

You can also use motion-detection alerts to keep track of your children, grandchildren and pets. Many doorbells let you specify the range that's covered and the type of movement they monitor, so you don't invade your neighbours' privacy or receive endless notifications.

5 Integrate your doorbell with your smart home

Video doorbells are usually controlled using an app on your phone or tablet, but you can also integrate them with a broader smart-home system. The obvious examples are to add an Amazon Ring doorbell to an Alexa system (like an Echo Show, pictured above) or a Google Nest doorbell to a Google Home setup, but a third-party device may also be compatible.

Advantages include controlling the doorbell with your voice, reviewing live or recorded footage on your smart TV or smart screen, and unlocking your door remotely using a smart lock. You can also set your smart lighting to turn on automatically when motion is detected outside.

6 Get evidence for insurance claims

Some online articles suggest having a video doorbell can reduce the cost of your home insurance, because it proves you've taken action to protect the property. However, although smart doorbells are now recognised home-security devices, there's no guarantee your insurance company will lower your premium after you buy one – though it won't hurt.

You're more likely to get a discount if you pair the doorbell with a security system that includes monitoring by a third-party. Even if you don't, it may at least give you timestamped video evidence to support an insurance claim.

WHICH VIDEO DOORBELL SHOULD YOU BUY?

GOLD AWARD

Eufy Video Doorbell E340

£160 from www.snipca.com/54301

You might expect one of Amazon's Ring doorbells to be our top recommendation, but their bargain prices are offset by the cost of a Ring Home subscription for storing videos online. Following Amazon's price rise last year, the Ring Home Basic plan now costs £4.99 a month or £49.99 a year.

In contrast, the Eufy Video Doorbell E340 (pictured right) has 8GB of built-in storage, which means you can back up a substantial amount of video without uploading anything to the cloud. Although it's more expensive than most Ring devices, you'll save a lot of money by not paying for a subscription, and all your videos will be stored locally.

If you'd prefer to save them online, Eufy's cloud storage is a reasonable £2.59 a month or £25.99 a year. Also, the E340 is regularly discounted – a recent Amazon 'Spring Deal' cut its price to £110.

The E340 comes with a mounting bracket and screws for attaching it to a wooden door frame, and wires for connecting it to an existing doorbell. Alternatively (and more easily), install it wirelessly, though you'll need to remove and recharge the battery every five or six months. You can buy a Eufy Doorbell Chime separately for £38 (www.snipca.com/54316).

Setting up the doorbell is very straightforward using the Eufy Security app for Android and iOS (www.snipca.com/54312), which you also use to view recorded footage and event alerts. The video feed from its two cameras is displayed in a split-screen arrangement: half showing the faces of visitors while the other focuses on your doorstep.

When someone presses your doorbell, you'll receive an alert on your phone and can then open the app to see who's calling. The device can also detect and alert you to motion, and lets you set up 'motion zones' to limit the areas covered and reduce the number of alerts.

The E340's 2K resolution video is crisp and detailed in daylight, while its night vision provides clear images after dark. The two-way audio is loud and well-defined.

Other useful features include timestamps that let you know when a package arrives, a warning sound for scaring off scavengers and a Quick Response feature that plays visitors a pre-recorded message. All this makes the Eufy Video Doorbell E340 an excellent choice if you want the main features of a Ring doorbell without being tied to a subscription.

The Eufy Video Doorbell E340 is easy to set up and captures high-quality video

SILVER AWARD

Tapo D235 2K 5MP

£120 from www.snipca.com/54314

The Tapo D235 (pictured below) is the successor to the popular D230S1, currently discounted to £85 on Amazon (www.snipca.com/54310). Like that doorbell, its 5-megapixel camera streams and records impressively detailed 2K video – higher quality than most Ring devices – but has an even wider field of view (180 degrees diagonally). This enables it to capture a full front porch or entryway, without any blind spots, though unlike our Gold Award winner it has only one camera.

You can connect the D235 to an existing doorbell chime using the supplied mounting brackets and wires. However, this isn't essential because – unlike the Eufy doorbell – it comes with a chime unit that plugs into a wall socket. This means you don't need to rely on your phone chiming to know when you have a visitor. When used wirelessly, Tapo claims the rechargeable battery will last up to 210 days from a single charge.

All the doorbell's features, including custom-detection zones, motion-detection sensitivity and LED light strength, are controlled through Tapo's mobile app. Like the Eufy E340, you can sound a loud siren remotely and set up voice responses for when you're not home. Although its night vision isn't the best we've seen, we like the option to switch between infrared and full-colour modes.

The D235 uses AI to differentiate between people, pets, vehicles and packages, and sends you appropriate notifications depending on what it detects. Most rival systems charge a subscription fee for this feature, but Tapo provides it for free.

Similarly, you don't need to pay for video storage, because you can simply insert a microSD card (not supplied) in the doorbell. To save footage online as well, subscriptions start from £2.49 a month.

The Tapo D235 doorbell comes with a chime and offers plenty of useful options

BRONZE AWARD

Ring Battery Video Doorbell Plus

£130 from www.snipca.com/54318

The Ring Battery Video Doorbell Plus (pictured above right) isn't Amazon's newest model (that's the Ring Battery Video Doorbell Pro – £200 from www.snipca.com/54327), but it offers the best balance between features, performance and price. It now costs £30 less than it did originally, and you can add a chime for an extra tenner.

The Doorbell Plus gives you a full-width, head-to-toe view of visitors, with a 150-degree field of view vertically and horizontally. The camera has a resolution of 2048x1536 pixels and colour night vision for enhanced clarity in the dark. The audio is pretty clear, provided your

Like all Ring doorbells, you need a subscription to access certain features on the Plus model

Google's Nest Doorbell looks great, but its video quality is only average

visitor is facing the bell; otherwise, it can be a little muffled, especially if you live on a busy road.

Setting up the doorbell is easy – though note that it only supports 2.4GHz Wi-Fi – and the rechargeable battery lasts three times longer than previous Ring models. Without paying for a Ring Home subscription, you can watch a live feed of your front door, use two-way audio to communicate with callers and adjust the camera's motion zones to prevent unnecessary alerts. The doorbell will also notify you when it detects movement outside of your home and, of course, when someone rings your doorbell.

With a subscription (which includes a 30-day free trial), you get lots more features and customisation options, including package detection, video previews of what triggered alerts and 180 days of event storage. It's a shame these aren't included in the basic Ring app, because you're essentially paying twice to get full use of your doorbell, which is why this one only merits our Bronze Award.

Best of the rest

Nest Doorbell

£179 (battery) or **£229** (wired) from www.snipca.com/54329

The sleek, futuristic design of Google's Nest Doorbell (pictured above right) brings a touch of class to any door, and it works seamlessly with other Google Nest and Home devices. Unlike Ring, it stores your event history for up to three hours for free, and saves 60 minutes of video to its built-in storage if it loses Wi-Fi connection.

Although its Full HD video quality is lower than our award-winning doorbells, the Nest is great at detecting people, animals and vehicles, and uses portrait rather than landscape mode. However, to have it recognise specific faces, and record and store footage for 60 days, you need to pay £5 a month for a Nest Aware subscription.

As the basic doorbell is already expensive, that might be a dealbreaker for some. It's also annoying that you can't buy a Nest chime, so you'll need to rely on your phone/tablet or smart speaker/screen to hear when someone's calling – or pay extra for the wired version and connect it to your existing doorbell.

Blink Video Doorbell

£30 from www.snipca.com/54332

Though you'll find cheaper smart doorbells from obscure brands, Amazon's Blink (pictured below) is the best budget device – with a couple of caveats. If you want to access the doorbell's video feed and use two-way audio at any time – not just when someone presses the button – you must also buy the Blink Sync Module 2 (www.snipca.com/54333). This costs an extra £40, or you can buy it bundled with the doorbell for £60 (www.snipca.com/54334 – £34 at the time of writing).

The Sync Module 2 lets you save footage locally by connecting a USB stick, but to record videos you need a Blink subscription, which costs £2.50 a month or £25 a year. Otherwise, you're limited to five minutes of live streaming.

Without those extras, you still get HD video, motion detection, voice control with Alexa and chime alerts in the Blink app. It's not a doorbell to impress your neighbours with, but it will save you money if you're not fussed about features.

Doro Hemma Doorbell

£150 from www.snipca.com/54335

Doro is known for designing simple smartphones for seniors, and its Hemma Doorbell (pictured below) is similarly easy to use. It comes with both a sticker and a wall mount you can screw in next to your front door, so you can have it up and running in 10 minutes. It also includes a Chime unit, which plugs into a power socket and produces a loud ring.

The Doro Hemma's 1080p camera sends a live video feed to the Doro app, alerts you when someone presses the doorbell or motion is detected, and has night vision to give you a clear view after dark. Insert an SD card (not included) to record videos without a subscription.

We particularly like the Assist function, which diverts the video feed to a friend or relative, so they can deal with a stranger at the door when needed. There's also a Siren button in the app, which plays a loud noise through the doorbell.

The Blink doorbell is cheap, but it lacks some essential features

The Doro Hemma Doorbell prioritises simplicity and convenience

Computer active

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MAKE YOUR VIDEO DOORBELL WORK BETTER

Adjust your doorbell's motion zone

By default, most video doorbells send alerts through their apps every time they detect movement in their field of view. This can quickly become annoying if you live on a busy street and are notified every time a person, vehicle or animal passes your house.

You can reduce the number of alerts by specifying a motion-detection zone in your doorbell's mobile app. This ensures you'll only receive alerts when someone or something enters that zone, not the camera's field of view.

The feature is called Motion Zone, Activity Zone or similar, depending on the brand, and is usually found in the doorbell app's Camera or Motion Settings. Tap the button to add a new zone, then drag the dots (see screenshot above right) to set its boundaries and tap Save. You can edit the zone later if required.

A Ring doorbell lets you set up to three motion zones, so you can exclude areas from the camera's view that keep triggering unnecessary alerts, and adjust the motion sensitivity. If you're using a battery-powered Ring device, you may need to turn on Advanced Motion Detection in the app.

Also look for a Privacy Zones feature, which blocks specific areas of the camera's view when you watch live or recorded videos. It works by imposing black rectangles over the private zones, and is useful if your neighbours might object to their property, car or activities being filmed.

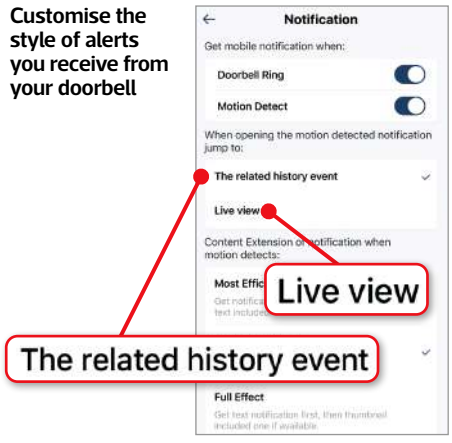
Customise your doorbell alerts

In addition to limiting the number of motion alerts from your video doorbell, you can customise the type of notification you receive for detected movement and doorbell presses. For example, you may prefer a text-only alert or one with a photo or video preview of the 'event'.

Go into the app's settings and look for a Notifications or Alerts section. Here, you should see options to change the notification style, and what to show when you open the alert – such as details of the event or the live view of your camera's feed (see screenshot below left).

You can also change the sound that plays when someone rings your doorbell or motion is detected, and turn off audio alerts between specific hours.

Set up motion zones to stop your doorbell sending unnecessary alerts

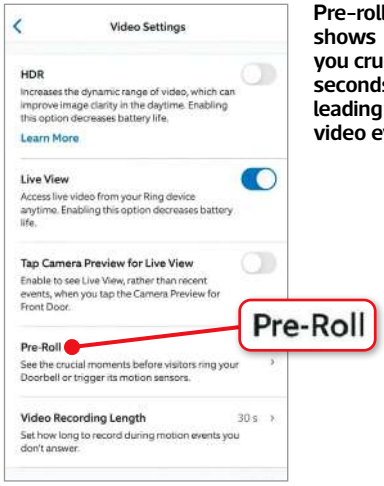


Customise the style of alerts you receive from your doorbell

Capture video before events happens

Some smart doorbells start capturing video a few seconds *before* motion is detected or their buttons are pressed. This seemingly magical 'pre-roll' feature is made possible by their cameras constantly recording throughout the day, but automatically discarding footage where nothing happens. When an event does occur, the doorbell can rewind to show you what led up to it – such as how the person arrived at your door and what they did before they rang (or didn't ring) the bell.

Our Gold- and Silver-award winning doorbells – the Eufy E340 and Tapo D235 – offer pre-roll, but only in their wired versions – presumably because the feature would quickly drain the battery of their wireless models. Some Ring doorbells include pre-roll, but not the Doorbell Plus we've reviewed. You can enable it in the Ring app by going to Settings, Device Settings, Video Settings and switching on Pre-Roll (see screenshot above right).


Video Settings
HDR
Increases the dynamic range of video, which can improve image clarity in the daytime. Enabling this option decreases battery life.
Learn More
Live View
Access live video from your Ring device anytime. Enabling this option decreases battery life.
Tap Camera Preview for Live View
Enable to see Live View, rather than recent events, when you tap the Camera Preview for Front Door.
Pre-Roll
See the crucial moments before visitors ring your Doorbell or trigger its motion sensors.
Video Recording Length
30 s
Set how long to record during motion events you don't answer.
Pre-Roll

Pre-roll shows you crucial seconds leading up to video events

Note that the few seconds of pre-roll footage may be silent, black-and-white and lower quality than standard video recordings.

Set up automated responses

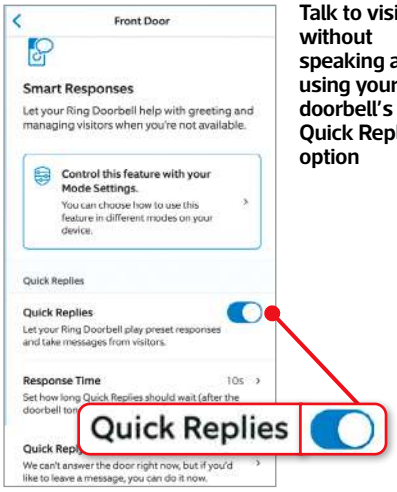
As well as chatting to callers remotely using two-way audio, many video doorbells let you play pre-recorded messages when you're not home or are unable (or unwilling) to answer the door. This allows you to deliver precise instructions, important information or just a friendly greeting, without getting drawn into a conversation. Instead, you just tap the relevant message in the mobile app to 'speak' it through the doorbell.

In Eufy's app for its smart doorbells, you can access the feature by choosing Quick Response on the Doorbell Settings screen. Select 'Add quick response', enter a suitable name for the message and tap Continue. Now press the Record button to record a message of up to 10 seconds.

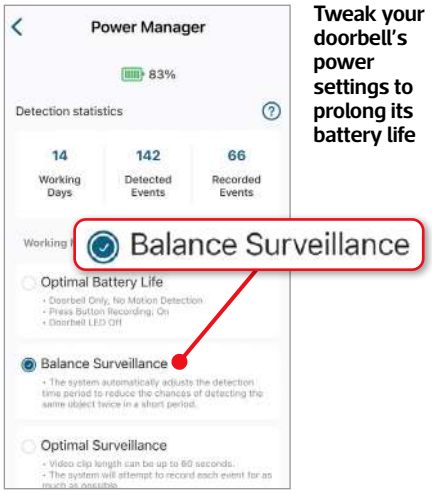
Listen to the result then save your quick response to use in future – Eufy lets you store up to three.

Other video doorbells – including Tapo's – offer a choice of preset voice responses to save you having to record your own. Ring calls the feature Quick Replies and you'll find it in the Smart Responses section of the mobile app (see screenshot right). Choose from messages including 'Hi! We'll be right there' and 'Sorry, we're not interested'.

You can specify how long your doorbell should wait before delivering the response, and have it accept messages from the caller. It's also possible to select and play Quick Replies when using your Ring doorbell's Live View.


Front Door
Smart Responses
Let your Ring Doorbell help with greeting and managing visitors when you're not available.
Control this feature with your Mode Settings.
You can choose how to use this feature in different modes on your device.
Quick Replies
Quick Replies
Let your Ring Doorbell play preset responses and take messages from visitors.
Response Time
10s
Quick Replies

Talk to visitors without speaking aloud using your doorbell's Quick Replies option



Tweak your doorbell's power settings to prolong its battery life

Make your doorbell's battery last longer

Fully recharging a video doorbell using a USB cable can take up to 10 hours, leaving you without remote surveillance and at the mercy of cold callers for the best part of a day. To stop yours running out of charge prematurely, it's worth tweaking its power settings to prolong its battery life.

In the Eufy app, go to Doorbell Settings then Power Manager to see the current battery level of your doorbell. If it's running low, switch to Optimal Battery Life mode, which disables motion detection and the doorbell's LED, and will only record video – for up to 20 seconds – when someone presses the button.

Alternatively, choose Balance Surveillance (see screenshot above right). This limits video recordings to 30 seconds and adjusts the motion-detection time to reduce the risk of the same person or object being detected twice.

Tapo suggests reducing the 'wake sensitivity' of its video doorbells to boost their battery life. Go into Device Settings and choose Detection, then 'Wake-up Sensitivity'. Drag the slider left to make the doorbell less sensitive, which means fewer recordings and longer times between recharges. You can also disable the AI-powered detection features, which may drain the battery.

With a Ring doorbell, go into Power Settings to check your battery level and tweak settings to make it last longer. For example, switch off Snapshot Capture (or increase the time between snapshots), change the Motion Frequency to make it only check for movement periodically and shorten the default length of video recordings.

Get notified when packages arrive

Many video doorbells can now identify packages and alert you when they arrive, albeit with varying degrees of success. The feature is separate from standard motion detection and may be disabled by default.

To activate it for your Eufy doorbell, which has a dedicated doorstep camera, go into Settings in the mobile app and switch on Delivery Guard. The option uses AI to notify you when a package is delivered or picked up, and can detect both boxes and bags.

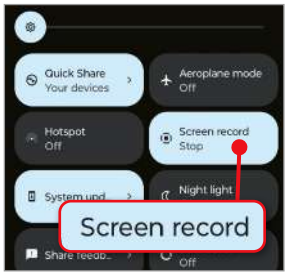
The latest Ring video doorbells provide package alerts through the Smart Alerts feature in the mobile app. Select that option in Motion Settings, and tap the bell icon under Package Zone to enable notifications. Choose 'Turn On Feature' next to Package Alerts, and define the area where packages are likely to be delivered. Press 'Done' to confirm and you'll be notified when a package arrives in your designated location (see screenshot below).

With a Tapo doorbell, you can turn on Package Detection in the Detection section of the app's Settings. This also includes options for detecting people, vehicles and pets.

Many video doorbells can now notify you when packages arrive

Record Ring videos without a subscription

If you want a Ring doorbell but don't want to pay for online storage, there is a free workaround. This involves capturing videos using a screen-recording tool on your phone or PC.



On an Android device, swipe down from the top of your screen to find the 'Screen record' option (see screenshot) – swipe right if you don't see it. If it's not there, tap the Edit (pencil) icon and drag 'Screen record' to your Quick Settings. When the Ring app notifies you of a doorbell event, tap Start to record the video that plays, or the camera's live view. Recordings can be accessed through Google Photos by choosing Collections then 'On this device' and selecting 'Screen record'.

On an iPhone, swipe down from the top-right corner of your screen to open the Control Centre and tap the grey Record button to start recording an event or video stream. Tap the red Screen Recording button to stop recording, then go to your Library in the Photos app to watch the video.

On your PC, the simplest option is to sign into Ring.com in your browser, then use screen-recording software such as OBS Studio (www.snipca.com/54349) to capture the view. If you have enough drive space, you can continuously record the live view, then refer to Ring's Event History to jump to important moments in the video.

WHICH SECURITY CAMERA SHOULD YOU BUY?

With a video doorbell watching the front of your house, consider buying a dedicated home-security camera to keep an eye on other outdoor and indoor areas. Buying a device from the same manufacturer as your doorbell will let you perform your surveillance through the same app, but you can save a lot of money by choosing a different brand. Here are three of the best budget security cameras.

Imou Rex 3D

£52 from www.snipca.com/54350

The Imou Rex 3D (pictured below) specialises in capturing footage after dark. Some indoor cameras activate a bright light when recording at night, but this one uses infrared to avoid disturbing anyone.

That makes it ideal for discreetly keeping tabs on your home, and watching over your pets while you're away. Indeed, the Rex 3D can differentiate between humans and animals, and notify you of their respective movements. If it detects too many events, you can reduce the motion sensitivity.

The Imou Rex 3D captures infrared video indoors at night

The camera's ball shape means it can roll around inside its stand and look in any direction, and its 3m power cord gives you flexibility when positioning it. The Rex 3D captures video in 1080p resolution as soon as it detects movement, and saves it either to a microSD card (not included) or to online storage, which costs from £2 a month.

Blink Mini 2

£30 from www.snipca.com/54353

The Blink Mini 2 (pictured above right) can be used indoors or out, though for the latter you'll need to buy the Weather Resistant Power Adapter (£9 from www.snipca.com/54352). Even that extra expense doesn't stop the camera being an amazing bargain – a recent deal reduced its price to just £18.

To keep the price down, the Blink Mini 2 makes a few sacrifices: it can't identify pets or vehicles (though it reliably detects people) and there's no internal storage. This means you need to pay from £2.50 a month for a Blink subscription if you want to watch saved footage, or buy a Blink Sync Module (see page 53).

However, it benefits from a wide (143-degree) field of view and can capture high-quality video day or night, using its infrared and colour night-vision modes.

The Blink Mini 2 offers a cheap way to watch your home

Swann CoreCam

£50 from www.snipca.com/54355

Stylish and fuss-free in design, the weatherproof Swann CoreCam (pictured above) comes with screws and plugs that make it easy – even for a DIY novice – to fix the camera to an indoor or outdoor wall. It connects to your Wi-Fi network over 2.4GHz and has a rechargeable battery, so there are no trailing cables.

The CoreCam includes everything you need from a home-security camera, including 1080p video recording, heat and motion sensing, night vision and two-way talk.

We particularly like Swann's True Detect technology, which detects people, packages, pets and vehicles, records their movement and alerts you via its app. This requires a subscription, which costs from £3.99 a month or £39.99 a year, and includes online storage. You get a 90-day free trial, so you can decide whether it's worth the money. ca

The Swann CoreCam can be used indoors or outdoors

Is it legal to record doorbell videos?

It's perfectly legal to record video footage through your smart doorbell or security camera, provided it films within the boundaries of your private property. If it captures areas beyond your property, such as a neighbour's house or garden, or the street in front of your home, you become subject to the Data Protection Act 2018.

This means you have responsibilities regarding the personal data you're collecting and processing. Under data-protection legislation, anyone captured in footage from your camera has the right to ask for a copy, have it erased and request that they're not filmed in future.

To be on the safe side, you can set up privacy zones (see page 55) or reposition your doorbell or camera to limit its field of view. Provided your security footage is deleted once it's no longer required, you can't be accused of hoarding other people's private data.

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WHY YOU DON'T NEED A VPN

VPNs are great – but they're not for everyone. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains why and reveals what you can use instead

We extolled the virtues of VPNs in Issue 692's Cover Feature, and we haven't changed our minds. They remain terrific tools for protecting your identity from websites you visit, encrypting your browsing data and blocking trackers. NordVPN (https://nordvpn.com) and Proton VPN (https://protonvpn.com) are among our favourites.

However, getting the most from a VPN often means subscribing to the premium version, which can be costly – and this could be overkill for many users. One alternative is using a remote-desktop tool, which provides a secure way to access a PC remotely, via the internet. With Microsoft axing the Remote Desktop app soon, we've recommended our favourite replacement on page 35. And in this feature we'll explain the other VPN alternatives – many of which won't cost you a penny.

Are VPNs really necessary?

Not long ago, vast swathes of the internet were entirely unencrypted, meaning it was very easy for your ISP, your employer or anyone else to snoop on your online activity. VPNs became popular because they provided a way to encrypt your web browsing and prevent anyone from seeing what you did online.

These days however it's estimated (by Google, among others) that as much as 99 per cent of websites are already encrypted, thanks in large part to widespread adoption of protocols like HTTPS and TLS. As such, a large proportion of your online activity is already private, whether or not you use a VPN.

Also remember that, while a VPN may block your ISP and others from tracking you, there's nothing stopping the VPN itself from snooping on you. The best VPNs – including those we recommend – operate a strict no-logs policy, meaning they don't store records of your browsing habits. But some, including many free VPNs, routinely collect data on their users. Sometimes, VPNs only log user activity to help improve their own services, but less scrupulous providers are happy to sell your data to marketing firms and advertisers.

Use a VPN? You might be blocked

Even if you use a no-log provider, you'll encounter an increasing number of sites and streaming services that will actively block you if they detect you're using a VPN. You can simply disable your VPN in order to visit them, but that kind of defeats the purpose – especially if you're paying for it.

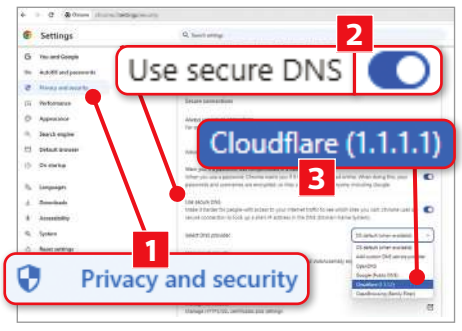
Bear in mind too that the process of encrypting your traffic and routing it through alternative servers can slow the speed of your connection. And, if you're on a capped or metered data connection – your mobile network, for example – you'll need to consider that VPNs can use extra data when you're browsing, potentially using up your allowance at a faster rate.

For many people, these downsides are acceptable trade-offs in return for enhanced privacy. But there are ways to achieve similar levels of protection without the compromise – or the cost.

Protect your privacy with secure DNS

Even though widespread encryption makes it hard for anyone to track your online activity, it's still possible for your ISP and other third parties to obtain basic information about which sites you've visited, whether they use HTTPS or not. This is because all requests for websites you make (by typing a URL into your address bar, for example) are, by default, funnelled in plain text through your internet provider's own DNS server.

But you don't need a VPN to keep this information private. You can use a



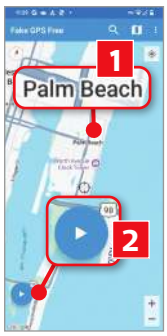
Select a different DNS in your browser's settings

Fake your GPS location on your phone

VPNs can make it look like you're accessing the internet from another country. But what if you want to fool an app or service that relies on GPS to establish your location into thinking you're somewhere else? That's where GPS spoofing comes in.

It's relatively easy to achieve this if you own an Android device by installing the free FakeGPS Location Spoofer app (www.snipca.com/54328, pictured). You'll need to turn on developer mode on your phone if you haven't already – do this by opening Settings, tapping About Phone, then tapping 'Build number' seven times until you see the message 'You are now a developer'.

Now launch the app and grant it the permissions it requests, then tap Enable at the bottom of the screen. Next, tap Developer Settings and scroll down to 'Select mock location app'. Tap this and select FakeGPS Free.



Now go back to the FakeGPS app, select the location you want on the map (it's Palm Beach, Florida, in our screenshot 1), then tap the Play button 2.

Due to the more locked-down nature of iOS, there's currently no simple way to spoof your GPS location on an iPhone.

technology called 'DNS over HTTPS' (DoH) to encrypt your DNS requests. It's free – and it's probably built into your browser. In Chrome, Edge and Brave, for example, click the menu button (three dots top right) then Settings. Now click 'Privacy and security' (1 in our screenshot below left – it's called 'Privacy, Search, and Services' in Edge), then Security, and make sure 'Use secure DNS' is enabled 2.

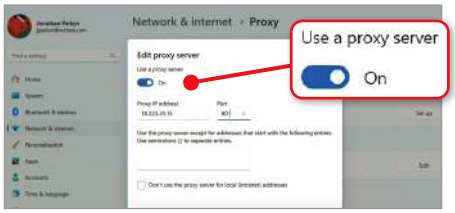
Below this, you'll see an option to select your own DNS service provider. Not all ISPs support secure DNS, so switching to an alternative provider can guarantee more privacy and, in some cases, faster browsing speeds. Cloudflare (1.1.1.1) 3, for example, provides an excellent balance of privacy and performance.

The easiest way to set up Cloudflare on a phone or tablet is to install the 1.1.1.1 app from your app store (Android www.snipca.com/54319; iOS www.snipca.com/54321). Launch the app and work through the setup screens, which will install a VPN profile on your device. This isn't actually a VPN – it's just a way to apply secure DNS to all your internet connections. Once this is set up, turn the Warp slider in the app to 'Connected' (see screenshot below).

Set up Cloudflare in the 1.1.1.1 app, then switch the Warp slider to 'Connected'

Hide your IP address with a proxy server

Like VPNs, proxy servers – or proxies – route all your internet traffic through an alternative IP address, masking your real IP address and making your activity anonymous. Proxy servers located in other territories can also grant you access to geographically restricted content. But, unlike VPNs, proxies don't encrypt your internet activity.



Set up a proxy server in the 'Network & internet' section of Windows Settings

You can set up a proxy server in Windows (in Settings under 'Network & internet' click Proxy, then 'Set up' and switch on 'Use a proxy server'- see screenshot above). Alternatively, you could install a free proxy switcher for your web browser, such as the Oxylabs Proxy Extension (www.snipca.com/54322), which lets you add multiple proxies and connect or disconnect from them at will.

The problem is that it can be hard to find dependable proxy servers. Websites like https://free-proxy-list.net publish constantly updated lists of free public proxies, but these can slow your connection, fail to load web pages and go offline without any warning.

Worse, an untrustworthy proxy could steal sensitive information, such as usernames and passwords, or infect your device with malware. You can reduce these risks by paying for a private proxy service, such as IPRoyal (https://iproyal.com), which offers access to trustworthy proxy IPs for a fee. However, these services can be expensive (from around £3 per GB) and are aimed at businesses.

A simpler (and cheaper) method is to use a free online web proxy service, such as Hide.me (www.snipca.com/54323) or Proxyium (https://proxyium.com). Both provide a way to browse websites anonymously by selecting a proxy IP address located in an alternative territory. Just type the URL of the site you want to visit and click Go. On the downside, free web proxies only offer a small selection of server locations. Hide.me, for example, only lets you choose between the Netherlands, Germany or Finland.

Browse anonymously with Tor

For most people, Tor (www.torproject.org) is a much simpler way to achieve a level of online anonymity than using a proxy server. It's a free privacy-focused web browser that routes your internet connection through alternative servers and encrypts your traffic multiple times. It blocks trackers and prevents anyone from logging the sites you visit. Launch Tor, then click the Connect button (see screenshot below) to start browsing anonymously.

Click the 'Connect' button in Tor to browse the web anonymously

Tor is available for Android devices, too (www.snipca.com/54324). And, while you can't currently install the official Tor app on iOS, you can use free, open-source alternatives, such as Onion Browser (www.snipca.com/54325) and Orbot (www.snipca.com/54326).

Tor's biggest downside is that all its encrypting and relaying can take a heavy toll on your internet speed. And while it's perfectly legal, criminals typically use it to avoid detection. As a result, some sites may block you if you attempt to visit them using Tor. ca

Change your browser extensions NOW!

Google is about to kill off lots of popular extensions for its Chrome browser. **Robert Irvine** recommends the best replacements for your favourite tools

Despite widespread opposition, Google has pursued its plan to end support for Manifest V2 (MV2) extensions in Chrome and other Chromium browsers (Brave, Edge, Opera, Vivaldi). It now insists developers use its new Manifest V3 (MV3) system and in June will stop MV2 extensions working altogether.

We've previously explained why Google is doing this and what it means for your favourite browser tools – see our 'Stop Google breaking your extensions' feature in Issue 691 (page 60). Now the deadline is almost upon us, here we list six popular MV2 add-ons that will soon be blocked in Chrome and suggest what to use instead.

1 uBlock Origin

www.snipca.com/54235

This excellent content blocker is the biggest casualty of Google's crackdown on MV2 extensions, and surely its prime target. With more than 34 million users in Chrome alone, uBlock Origin has long been the most effective tool at blocking ads, trackers and other online annoyances – and thereby undermining Google's business model.

As we reported in Issue 705 (page 6), Google has now disabled uBlock Origin in Chrome and you can no longer install it from the Chrome Web Store "because it doesn't follow best practices for Chrome extensions". At the time of writing, it was still possible to re-enable the add-on, but this option will soon be removed.

The developer has created an MV3-compatible version, uBlock Origin Lite (www.snipca.com/54237), which works very well, but lacks some features of the original extension, such as adding custom filters and blocking specific page elements.

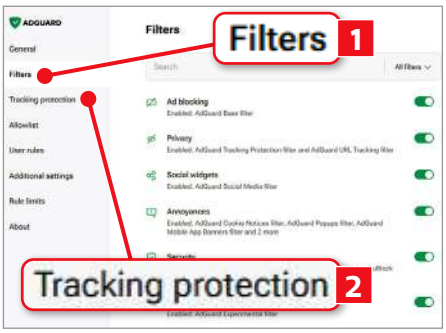
USE INSTEAD

AdGuard AdBlocker

www.snipca.com/54236

AdGuard has updated its AdBlocker to comply with Manifest V3 and continue blocking ads, trackers, pop-ups, social-media widgets and much more. For the highest level of protection, go into the extension's Settings and enable all the options in the Filters section (1 in our screenshot below).

You should also switch on 'Tracking protection' 2 and 'Block search ads and websites' self-promotion' (in the General section). Currently, AdGuard doesn't let you add custom filters but the option is "coming back soon", once the company can make it work within MV3's limitations (see www.snipca.com/54239). In the meantime, you can block elements not covered by its main filters by adding your own filtering rules.



Enable all AdGuard filters to make it as reliable as uBlock Origin

2 uMatrix

www.snipca.com/54240

UMatrix hasn't been updated for four years, so it's not as great a loss as uBlock Origin. However, it's one of the four MV2 extensions Brave has promised to support for as long as it can (see box opposite), so it's clearly valued by some users. "So good it had to be blocked... shame on you Google" says one comment in the Chrome Web Store.

It lets you enable and disable specific website requests, block cookies and scripts, filter images and videos, and save your preferences for only the current site or every page you visit. This not only boosts your privacy, but helps to speed up your browsing.

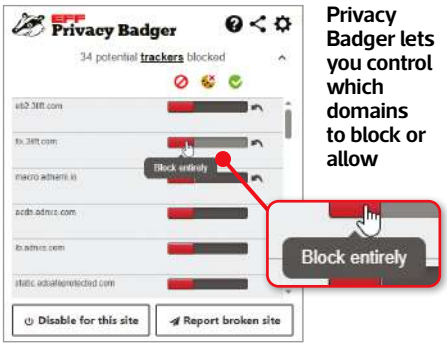
USE INSTEAD

Privacy Badger

www.snipca.com/54242

Although Privacy Badger lacks the nuanced control of uMatrix – it doesn't let you block specific page elements – it offers similar protection against online trackers. The extension blocks third-party trackers on every page you visit and lists the offending domains.

Click its toolbar button to view the details, then use the individual sliders to decide whether to block a domain



Privacy Badger lets you control which domains to block or allow

entirely (see screenshot above), allow it to display content but block its cookies, or allow it completely (if you have problems loading the page).

3 ClearURLs

www.snipca.com/54244

We've often recommended using ClearURLs to stop websites tracking you, so we're sorry to see it killed off by MV3. It protects your privacy by removing tracking elements from URLs you copy to your clipboard and from links on web pages, so you can click them without being redirected through a third-party service.

Brave and Firefox now let you copy clean links without tracking, but as it's unlikely Google will add the option to Chrome, ClearURLs will be sorely missed.

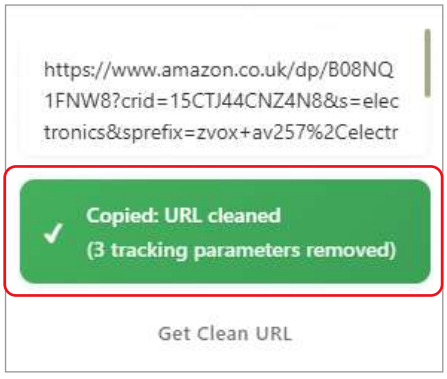
USE INSTEAD

Get Clean URL

www.snipca.com/54246

AdGuard includes a URL Tracking filter, which works in a similar way to ClearURLs by removing tracking parameters from links on web pages. This filter is also available in uBlock Origin Lite.

To copy clean links as well, your best option is the new extension Get Clean URL. Click its toolbar button to copy the URL of the current page to your clipboard with all the tracking elements removed (see screenshot below).



Get Clean URL copies links from your browser without tracking elements

4 Cookie AutoDelete

www.snipca.com/54247

Cookie AutoDelete gives you total control over which cookies you delete from your browser. You can whitelist specific domains to save their cookies and avoid being signed out of your accounts, set others to be wiped automatically when you close their tabs and 'greylist' cookies to keep them only until you restart the browser.

The extension also lets you perform manual cookie clean-ups, and keeps a log of everything it's deleted.

USE INSTEAD

Auto Cookie Deleter

www.snipca.com/54248

This extension is the closest equivalent to Cookie AutoDelete we could find, but it's not as sophisticated. It lets you delete all cookies for the current domain or except for open tabs, and create a whitelist of sites whose cookies you want to keep.

It also has an Active Mode (see screenshot right), which automatically deletes site cookies when you close their tabs, and keeps track of how many cookies it's wiped. Just be careful you don't delete more cookies than you intend to.

My Location Guard fools sites that you're three miles away

5 Location Guard

www.snipca.com/54251

Location Guard is another useful privacy tool you can no longer install. It fakes your geographic location so websites can't pinpoint your precise whereabouts. Unlike a VPN, your spoofed location won't be in another country but about 4.5 miles away, so you can still get local information. Alternatively, you can use the 'Fixed location' option to place yourself anywhere you want.

USE INSTEAD

My Location Guard

www.snipca.com/54252

This extension works in a similar way to its near-namesake, by letting you pretend to be up to 5,000 metres (3.1 miles) away from your real location. You can save your spoofed whereabouts for up to an hour, and choose 'Fake location' to appear to be in a random country. See our feature on page 60 for more advice on faking your location.

Keep using your favourite extensions

Many Manifest V2 extensions remain available from the Firefox Add-ons store. Mozilla says it has no plans to phase out MV2 and will continue to support it in Firefox alongside new MV3 add-ons (www.snipca.com/54253).

In Edge, you can currently still install MV2 extensions – both from its own Add-ons Store and the Chrome Web Store. However, Microsoft has reportedly started disabling them in the Canary build of the browser, which is aimed at developers.

Other Chromium browsers, including Brave, Vivaldi and Opera, will be obliged to follow Google's rules and complete their transition to Manifest V3 before June 2025. But Brave has pledged to support some MV2 add-ons – including uBlock Origin – "for as long as we are able", and Opera has made a similar promise (www.snipca.com/54254). Both browsers' built-in ad blockers will be unaffected by the change.

6 Notepad

www.snipca.com/54249

Although this extension (unrelated to the Windows tool) was last updated last September, it failed to migrate to Manifest V3. Notepad provides an easy way to make notes as you browse the web and syncs with your Chrome profile so you can access the content on other devices. "Leave it to Google to deprecate something that actually worked", complains one former user.

USE INSTEAD

Note Sidebar

www.snipca.com/54250

This extension lets you make notes in Chrome's sidebar, which are saved and synced automatically. It looks very basic, but go into its Options and you'll find lots of customisation settings, including rich-text formatting, note downloads and password protection.

Note Sidebar even has a 'read aloud' text-to-speech option – see page 42 for more on this feature in Chrome. ca

Problems Solved

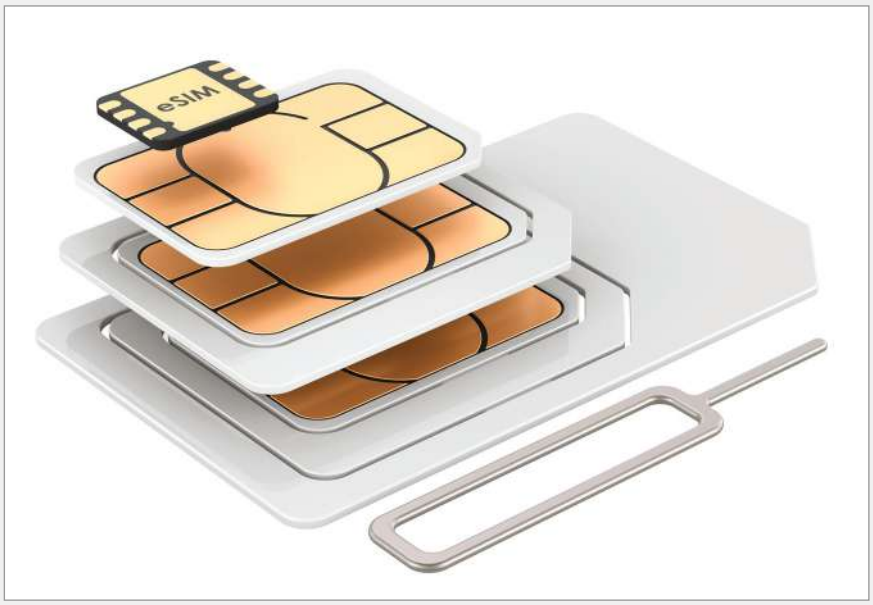
Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

What should I do with my old SIM card?

Q After many years I recently switched mobile networks from Three to Smarty. The switch went relatively smoothly, and as a result I'll save a little money every month. However, I now have an unwanted SIM card. I assume Three will have disabled it, but it made me wonder about the best way to dispose of it. As I assume it's made of plastic, I don't really want to throw it in the bin. Besides, would that be safe? Is any of my data or account information still on it? Can SIM cards be recycled?

Gavin Edwards



SIM cards are made mostly of plastic, with some minerals including a tiny amount of gold

A You raise a number of interesting questions, so let's take them one at a time. First, assuming you used a port-authorisation code (PAC) to switch from Three to Smarty – keeping your old phone number in the process – then, yes, Three will have disabled your SIM card automatically during the switch.

If for some reason you didn't do this and instead bought a new SIM from Smarty with a new phone number, then in theory your old Three SIM card could still be functioning. The onus would be on you to cancel your account with the company. We're guessing you've done that, however, or you'd still be being paying Three, so the result is the same: the SIM card should be disabled.

In theory, someone could pick up your old SIM and put it in a phone, but they'd simply see an 'Invalid SIM' message or similar. However, if you want to be absolutely sure no one can ever use it, simply use a sturdy pair of scissors to snip the card in half, directing your cut right through the middle of the metal electrical contacts.

This brings us to your second question. Yes, SIM cards are mostly made of plastic, which is good for our purposes because it means they're easy to cut in half with scissors. They also contain silicon and some metals, including gold, but don't get too excited: we're talking minuscule amounts. You'd need literally thousands of old SIM cards to extract even a few quid's worth of gold.

Even then, it's very difficult to get the stuff off the cards. Some companies offer SIM card-recycling services but only on an industrial scale, and they don't deal with the general public.

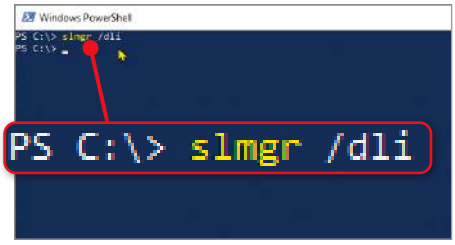
This means your best option is to return your SIM to a nearby Three store, because under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) regulations, companies selling electrical equipment and accessories must offer free take-back services in their stores for anything they originally supplied. Presenting the staff with an old SIM card might baffle them, and there's a chance they'll just throw it in the bin once you've left, but at least you can satisfy yourself that you tried.

SIM cards are easy to cut in half with scissors

Can I clone my current Windows setup to a new PC?

Q I have an OptiPlex 9020 desktop PC that's showing its age and can't run Windows 11, so I realise I'll have to replace it soon. I've been looking at the Palicomp AMD Cobra, which you currently recommend (see page 30), but the thought of having to reinstall all my software is daunting. Would I be able to clone my OptiPlex hard drive instead, then install it in the new Cobra PC? If so, could I then upgrade the Cobra to Windows 11. Would my software still work if I tried this?

Tony Perry



Type this into PowerShell to see which type of Windows licence you have

An OEM licence is tied to the PC it came with, and can't be activated on a new computer

A Cloning a PC's hard drive and installing it in a new computer might seem like a clever way to avoid reinstalling everything, but it's a process that's fraught with difficulties and we would never recommend it.

For starters, there are major hardware differences between your two PCs. Even if Windows might launch from the cloned drive, it would throw up a barrage of errors as dozens or hundreds of drivers are confronted with the new hardware.

In addition, even if you managed to iron out all the driver problems, there's no guarantee your apps would work on the new setup – at least not without you reinstalling them first.

Windows 10 may also refuse to activate on new hardware. This will certainly be the case if your old computer came with an original-equipment manufacturer (OEM) Windows licence, which is highly likely with a Dell computer. To check this, first press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu, then click 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'. Now type slmgr /dli (see screenshot above) and press Enter. The box that appears will show whether your Windows has a retail or OEM license (see screenshot above).

So in short, you'd be stuck with broken drivers, apps that don't work and a copy of Windows 10 that won't activate, let alone allow you to upgrade to Windows 11. In other words, forget it.

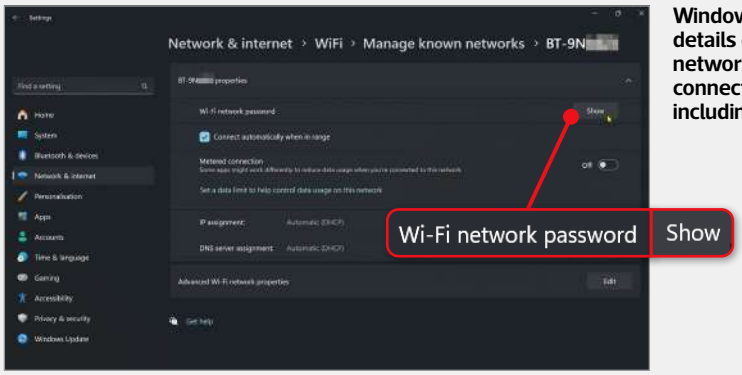
It's true that setting up a new PC takes some effort, and the thought of reinstalling loads of apps can be daunting. However, modern broadband speeds and the ability to download your software means the process is nowhere near as painful as it used to be. It's certainly less of a headache than trying to coax a cloned system drive to work in a new PC.

Is Glow a security risk to my home Wi-Fi?

Q While exploring Glow (www.snipca.com/52372), which you've recommended previously, I was alarmed to find that the Wi-Fi Password Showing Tool revealed not only the passwords for my various Wi-Fi connections, but also for several other Wi-Fi networks it could detect. This meant I could see passwords associated with my neighbours' Wi-Fi.

If I can see this, presumably anyone who has this software can see my Wi-Fi password. Surely this is a major security issue.

Charles Etchells



Windows 11 keeps details of every network you've connected to, including passwords

A It certainly would be if that's what the Wi-Fi Password Showing Tool did, but thankfully it doesn't. Instead, it lists all the networks your computer has ever been connected to, along with their passwords. This information is already stored on your computer.

In fact, you don't even need a tool like Glow to access this data. In Windows 11, for example, click Start followed by Settings then 'Network & internet', then click Wi-Fi followed by 'Manage known networks'. Click a network name and then, next to 'Wi-Fi network password', click the Show button (see screenshot).

Glow isn't doing anything you can't do without the software – it simply makes it a little easier. At some point or other, your computer has been connected to every network that appears in the Wi-Fi Password Showing Tool's list.

If you want to remove a network and its password from this list, return to the 'Manage known networks' page, then click the network's name followed by the Forget button.

Does my laptop support Bluetooth LE?

Q Under 'Bluetooth' in Device Manager, my Asus Zenbook UX3404VC laptop lists 'Bluetooth LE Generic Attribute Service'. However, I can't see the 'Use LE Audio when available' option you mentioned in Issue 699 (page 36). Is my PC compatible? If not, is there a website that lists which laptops are?

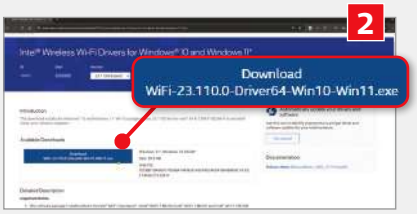
Nicolaas Spek

A According to the Asus website, your laptop has an integrated Intel AX211 Bluetooth 5.3 card. This supports Low Energy (LE) technology, but the hardware needs specific drivers for it to work. These could come from Microsoft, Intel or Asus.

Microsoft doesn't create drivers for every hardware combination, hence the generic drivers. Asus has published several Bluetooth driver updates for your model at www.snipca.com/53950. However, the most recent is from June 2023 (see screenshot 1), so we wouldn't count on there being any more.

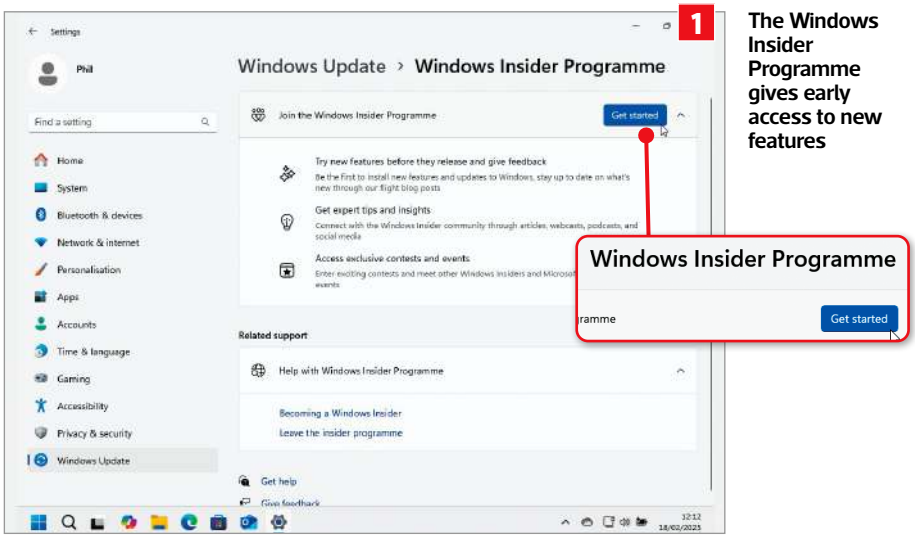
That leaves Intel, which published updated drivers in February this year, at www.snipca.com/53951 2. We don't have your model of laptop, so we can't try them, but we think installing these will fix your problem.

Asus last updated Bluetooth drivers for the Zenbook 14X almost two years ago



Intel's recent driver updates might bring Bluetooth LE to our reader's laptop

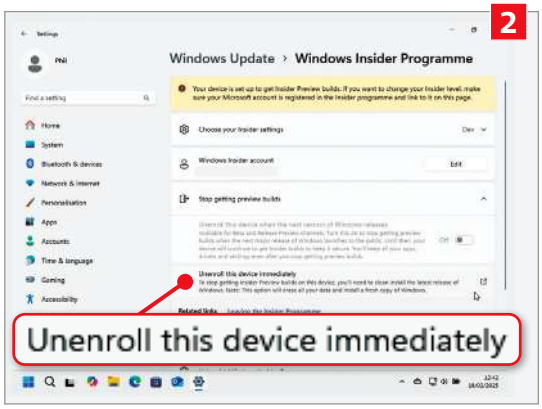
What's this 'Windows expiring' pop-up?



The Windows Insider Programme gives early access to new features

Q I keep seeing an annoying pop-up that appears now and then to tell me my Windows build will expire soon. I can't seem to get rid of it. Can you help?

Clive Tipton



To unenroll from the Windows Insider Programme, select your preferred option in Windows Update

A This message is almost certainly the result of opting into the Windows Insider Programme (see screenshot 1). This gives users access to new features and updates before they're released to the wider community of users. There are different types of Insider opt-ins, each with varying levels of risk. Depending on the level and how your system is set up, you might need to update Windows manually by going to Settings, then Windows Update.

Alternatively, you can change the Insider level you're on to reduce the need to update frequently, or 'unenroll' from the programme completely. To do the former, first visit Windows Update and click Windows Insider Programme. Next, at the top next to 'Choose your Insider settings', open the dropdown menu and select a different option: Beta Channel or Release will minimise problems.

To leave the Insider programme, you can click 'Unenroll this device immediately' 2 or 'Unenroll this device when the next version of Windows releases'. If you select the first option, you'll need to perform a clean install of Windows, so the second is the best in most cases. Click the slider to its On position, then wait until Microsoft updates Windows.

Q: Can I buy a PAYG 4G dongle??

A: Issue 695, page 65 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

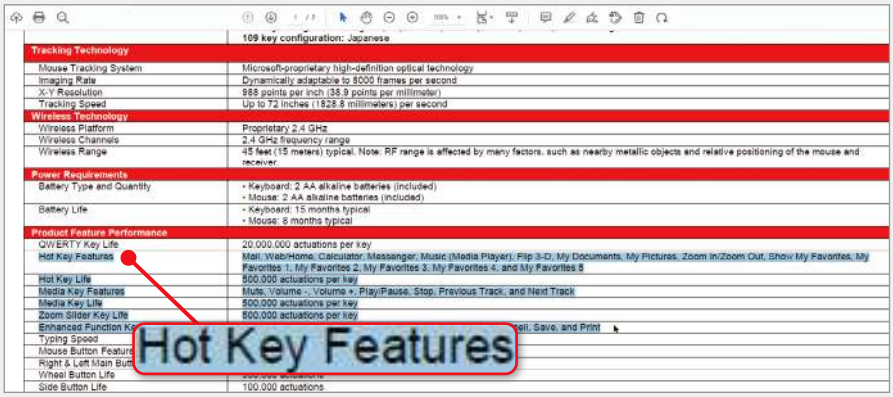
Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

What are these extra keys on my old Microsoft keyboard?

Q I've just acquired a second-hand Microsoft Wireless 3000 V2.0 keyboard and mouse in nearly mint condition, and it works perfectly. However, the keyboard has lots of extra keys with functions that aren't clear from their symbols, so I don't know what they're for.

I'd love to get my hands on the manual, but it seems not to exist, and I'm not the only one looking for it. Any ideas?

Tom Liversage



This online technical data sheet explains what each key on the Microsoft 3000 keyboard does

A It's rare that something disappears from the internet completely but we agree that the manual for this particular Microsoft keyboard is nowhere to be found. It's possible there was never a user manual as such, and that help was found within IntelliType, the Microsoft driver software that originally supported this product. However, IntelliType was discontinued well over a decade ago, and your keyboard is older still.

IntelliType's replacement was Microsoft Mouse and Keyboard Center, which is a free download from www.snipca.com/53952. This supports lots of Microsoft mice and keyboards – both recent and ancient – and can detect connected devices automatically. We don't have a Wireless 3000 device to test this with, but it's the best place to start.

After trawling through the Internet Archive (https://archive.org), which stores old versions of billions of web pages, we eventually found a link to a technical data sheet for your keyboard, which was lurking in the deepest recesses of Microsoft's website at www.snipca.com/53953.

It's not a manual, but it does include a summary of what all the keys do (see screenshot). We think this, in combination with Mouse and Keyboard Center, should help you discover what all those extra keys are for.

Why all these verification hurdles to access my accounts?

Q I've noticed recently that whenever I try to log into my Yahoo email account I have to go through several tedious 'identity confirmation' steps. This typically involves spotting fire hydrants, cross-walks, buses, bridges or some other random objects. Sometimes I also have to use a code sent by text message to my mobile phone or an associated email account.

I know that friends have experienced this too. Is this because Yahoo has been subject to repeated hacking attempts or is there some other reason?

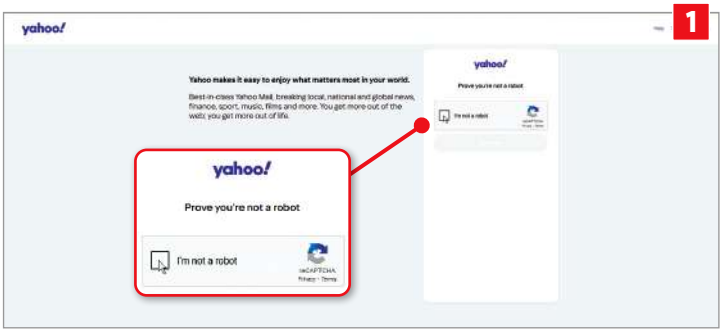
Frank Fitzgerald

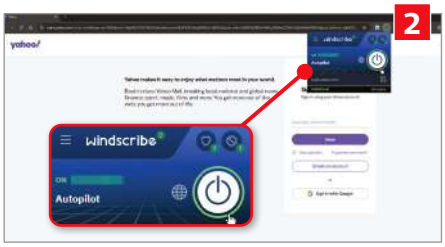
A What you're describing are known as CAPTCHAs, an awkwardly contrived acronym for Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart, (see screenshot 1) and they're very common these days. Companies use them for all sorts of reasons, but their main purpose is to ensure that visitors to the website are humans and not automated programs (or 'bots').

Yahoo hasn't suffered any headline hacking attacks or data breaches recently, or none at least that it's revealed. However, it's possible the company has been suffering a spike in DDoS attacks, where someone uses bots to stop certain web services working for whatever malicious reason.

Alternatively, if you or your friends are trying to connect using a VPN service such as Windscribe 2 or NordVPN, don't be surprised if a website such as Yahoo asks you to confirm that you're human. The point of VPNs is to mask a user's identity, so it will inevitably trigger web defences.

Websites use CAPTCHA puzzles to make sure visitors are human and not bots





Using a VPN such as Windscribe makes it more likely a website will question your identity

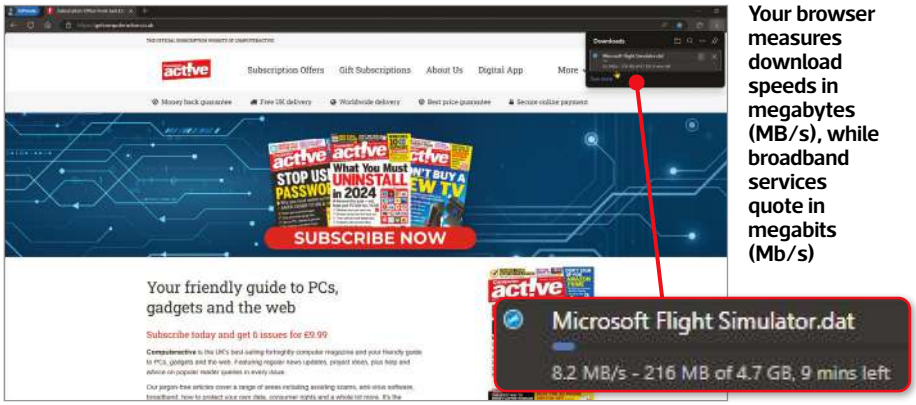
Is Microsoft capping my download speed?

Q I have stable broadband speeds of around 40Mbps, though I'll soon be getting full fibre. I also have a fairly powerful PC, which I mainly use for Microsoft Flight Simulator.

For various reasons I sometimes have to uninstall and reinstall this program, which always takes hours because downloads seem to be capped at less than 10MB/s (see screenshot right). Can I find out where the UK servers are and, if speeds are restricted, what the limit is and why?

I suspect that even with full-fibre broadband, my download times will still be limited by the servers.

Ian Easson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Your friendly guide to PCs, gadgets and the web
Microsoft Flight Simulator.dat
8.2 MB/s - 216 MB of 4.7 GB, 9 mins left

Your browser measures download speeds in megabytes (MB/s), while broadband services quote in megabits (Mb/s)

A Big companies such as Microsoft have server 'farms' all over the world. It's practically impossible for users to know which one they might be connected to at any given moment and what limitations might be in place.

However, we think the problem here might be a common mix-up between megabits (Mb) and megabytes (MB). Modern browsers, the Microsoft Store (pictured right) and even Windows itself give download speeds in megabytes per second.

However, a megabyte is eight times bigger than a megabit. So, while all sorts of factors contribute to real-world results, getting 9MB/s from a '40Mbps' connection is impressive and suggests your broadband line may be performing well above its advertised speed.

When you switch to full fibre, assuming you have a nominal connection of 900Mbps, you can expect download speeds – as measured by Windows – to increase considerably, perhaps to 100MB/s or more.

Microsoft Store could be connected to any of the company's servers anywhere in the world, so it's impossible to tell which one

How can a new router provide speeds of 9.6Gbps?

Q In Issue 701's Cover Feature, 'Why You Must Bin Your Old Router (www.snipca.com/54201), you mention that buying a new router could, in theory, increase Wi-Fi speeds to 9.6Gbps or even more.

However, my broadband ISP offers maximum download speeds of 50Mbps, so how is this even possible? Thanks for a great magazine!

John Reed

A router like the TP-Link Archer AX53 can speed up your home network, but not the broadband coming into your property

A It's important to understand that a new router won't increase your incoming broadband speed. Rather, it increases the speed of your Wi-Fi network. So devices that connect to the internet through the router will never receive speeds of more than the maximum broadband speed (around 50Mbps, in your case).

However, a newer router – like the pictured TP-Link Archer AX53 – lets you transfer data faster over your home network. If you send files between computers, for example, or stream high-resolution video from a NAS drive, you'll benefit from the higher Wi-Fi speeds. These activities are confined to your own network so they're not limited by your broadband speed.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

CPUs and NPUs?

Q I'm thinking of buying a new Windows 11 laptop. During my research I'm seeing plenty of mentions of AI and NPUs, alongside all the usual claims about powerful CPUs and graphics. I understand that the CPU runs everything, but what exactly does an NPU do?

The manufacturers suggest it helps with AI, but is that just a buzzword or does it actually matter? Will an NPU make my laptop faster in everyday jobs, or is it only useful for AI tasks? I'm curious as to whether this is something new and exciting or just marketing fluff, and whether it's worth paying extra for a laptop that has an NPU?

Rachel Simmons

A This is a great question. NPUs, or neural-processing units, are certainly a new buzzword – but they're more than merely another marketing term. To understand why, we need to consider how they fit with other components.

A laptop's central-processing unit (or CPU) is the daily workhorse, handling every Windows operation, running apps and more. As you might guess, the graphics-processing unit (or GPU) takes care of visuals – such as gaming and video playback.

Support Knowledge Base
How to Check If My Intel® Processor Has a Neural Processing Unit (NPU)
Support Knowledge Base
The information of the Integrated NPU
Intel® Core™ Ultra Processors

Check whether your Intel processor has an NPU at the company's Support Knowledge Base page

NPUs have actually been around for a good while, but it's only very recently that they've made an entrance in consumer markets. These chips are designed specifically for AI-related tasks, such as those introduced by Windows 11's Copilot tool. So, for example, a CPU can now offload AI tasks such as background blur or noise cancellation in video calls to a dedicated NPU chip. There's no reason why a CPU or GPU couldn't be made to perform these tasks, but an NPU is specifically designed for them – improving performance while using less power. This frees up the CPU to keep the PC running smoothly, while preserving battery life.

For everyday use, you're very unlikely to know or care that a PC has an NPU, though many new ones do (check Intel's guidance at www.snipca.com/53954 – see screenshot). However, as AI-powered features become more common, Windows and its endless tools and apps will rely more heavily on the presence of an NPU, and likely eventually require one in order to work at all – so buying a laptop with an NPU does offer a degree of future-proofing.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Did TalkTalk leak my personal data to scammers?

Q Following your ideas on switching to mobile broadband (Issue 680, page 60) I took the plunge and left TalkTalk after 15 years. The switch went smoothly and I'm happy with Three. However, since closing the account I've been inundated with emails supposedly from TalkTalk. They're obvious scams, but my worry is how do the scammers know I've quit TalkTalk?

Have my details been sold or used by someone at TalkTalk, or has someone else gained access to my details since the TalkTalk data breach that it played down as a non-event?

Ed Smith

A It's very unlikely that TalkTalk directly sold your info, but given the big data breach the company suffered back in 2015, your details are probably still floating around in scammer circles. As well, simply shopping around for a new provider is enough to trigger all kinds of marketing activities targeted at you, both legitimate and dodgy.

Use the Have I Been Pwned? website to see which of your email addresses has been part of a breach

In this case, scammers are evidently trying to reel you in by convincing you that they are TalkTalk – a company from whom you might actually be expecting emails during a process of switching.

We'd suggest using the Have I Been Pwned? website, at https://haveibeenpwned.com (pictured above), to see which of your email addresses may have been part of a breach. But really, our advice is not to worry too much. While these might be targeted or well-timed scam messages, they're not a personal attack on you: just a bunch of criminals using details they likely already had to try to con you. You'll be one of millions in their sights every hour of every day. Mark their messages as spam, delete them and move on.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 23 Apr

- What are these unsupported apps?
- How can I make my old game work?
- Can I add Bluetooth LE?

...And many more

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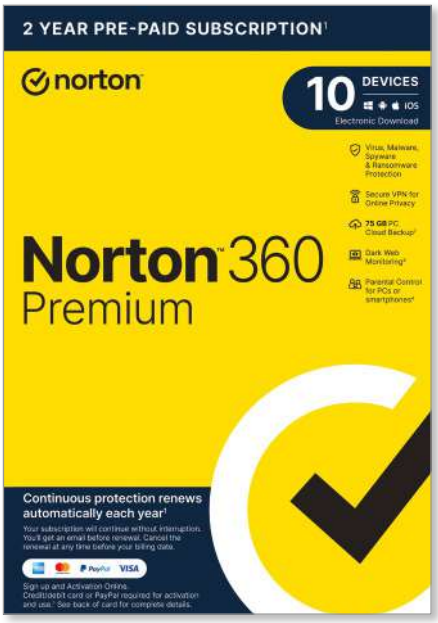

Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

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Problems Solved

Reader Support

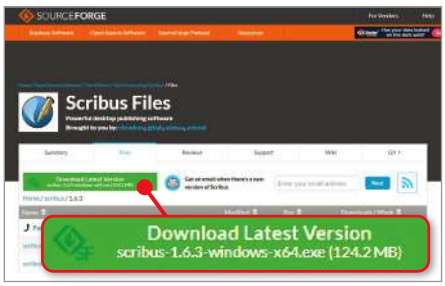
Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

Why is Scribus asking for my credit-card details?

Q Recently you've recommended Scribus (www.scribus.net) as a replacement for Microsoft Publisher (Issue 703, page 20). You say it's free, but when I've tried to download it, it asks for my credit-card details and shows a 'free trial' period. There's no indication of the cost. Is this right?

Vanessa Cheek

A No it's not. Scribus is completely free, so you should never need to give your credit-card details. Go to www.scribus.net and click Download at the top of the page. There are lots of versions available, but we recommend the latest stable version (1.6.3, at the time of writing). There's a link for Windows 32bit PCs and one for 64bit. Clicking the link under the version you need takes you to SourceForge, which is a site that hosts software downloads. Here, click the green 'Download Latest Version' button (see screenshot below).

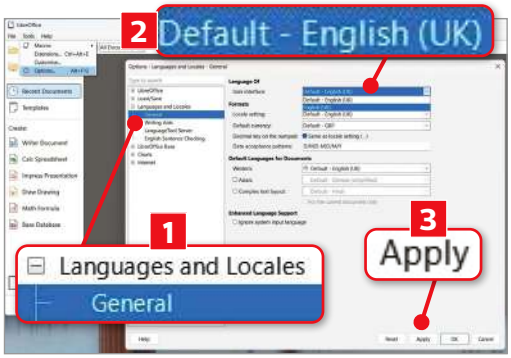


Scribus is completely free – to get it click this Download button on the SourceForge site

Why isn't the new LibreOffice in English?

Q I've just followed your advice in Issue 705 (page 7) to download LibreOffice 25.2.1 from www.snipca.com/53998. It has completed, but the new version has a weird language associated with it even though I specified 'English (GB)'. How can I restore it to English?

Alan Hammond



Click 'Languages and Locales', then General and select 'English (UK)' in the top dropdown menu

A You could try changing LibreOffice's language in the program's Options screen, though this might be tricky if the language is not English – so we'll explain in clear detail. From the main LibreOffice launch screen, click Tools (the middle of the three menu headers in the top left), then Options (the last item in the menu – marked with a cog icon).

In the window that opens, click the plus sign (+) next to 'Languages and Locales' (the third item down in the left-hand pane), then General (the first option that appears below 'Languages and Locales' – 1 in our screenshot above). On the right, select 'English (UK)' in the top dropdown menu 2 then click Apply 3.

If this doesn't work, uninstall LibreOffice then run the installer again, opting for 'Custom setup'. Now expand the 'User interface languages' heading and make sure all options have a red X next to them, except 'English (United Kingdom)'. Follow the remaining prompts to reinstall the program.

Is my TV's screen flicker giving me eye strain?

Q I've just read your article (Issue 704, page 60) on pulse width modulation (PWM) and screen flicker with interest, as my TV is causing me bad eye strain. I have tried everything my optician has recommended to no avail, but no one has mentioned PWM to me.

The LED Light Flicker Meter app you recommended (Android www.snipca.com/53803; iOS www.snipca.com/53804) shows the TV flicker rate is between 45 and 80 per cent. When I search online how to adjust this setting the advice refers to the screen's refresh rate. I've gone through all the picture settings on my TV and the flicker readings remain the same.

Do you have any advice that might help? My TV is a LG LED TV set and is about five years old.

Alan Everitt

A In our feature, we focused on PWM flicker from phone screens. But as we pointed out, many other devices – including TVs – use similar display technologies, which can cause eyestrain, migraines and nausea.

You're more likely to experience flickering in cheaper TVs. Many LCD and LED TVs, for example, use PWM to control brightness levels (by turning their backlight on and off rapidly), which can be perceived as flicker. But even some higher-end TVs, including OLED models, use PWM to dim the screen.

It's hard to find information about which TVs use PWM. Your best bet is to refer directly to the manufacturer. Alternatively, you could take your LED Light Flicker Meter app into a TV showroom and test the TVs there.

You may be able to reduce the effects of PWM on your current TV, but methods vary according to the exact model. Try disabling dynamic dimming or auto-brightness, if your set has those settings. Also switch your picture setting to game mode (if available), as this disables auto-dimming functions.

Look in your settings for an Eye Care mode (or similar) and try turning it on. It's possible to switch off PWM on some TVs by entering the service menu, but we urge caution here because you can damage your TV by changing the wrong settings.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

2K A screen with 2048x1080 pixels.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

7z A format for compressing files into an archive format.

Add-in Microsoft's name for tools that can be added to Office software.

AMOLED An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays.

Augmented reality Lets you view the real world on a screen and add virtual elements.

AV1F AV1 Image File Format. An open-source image file format.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Benchmarking Comparing software and hardware with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Bluetooth LE Bluetooth low energy. A type of Bluetooth technology designed to consume less power.

Bot Automated software designed to perform specific tasks.

CAPTCHA Distorted text you have to type to prove you're a human.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users.

Clean install An operating system installation that overwrites all other content on the hard drive.

Clone A feature found in some backup programs that makes an exact copy of a drive.

CMYK Refers to the four coloured inks found in many printers: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black.

Contrast ratio A measure of the difference between the darkest and lightest shades on a screen.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

DDoS Direct Denial of Service. A targeted cyber-attack which brings down a web server.

Developer mode Features and tools that let developers experiment with software.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

DNS A technology that associates computers with their addresses on the internet.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

DPI Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality, or the size an object will be shown on screen.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

FAST Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television. TV channels that stream content online for free but are supported by advertisements.

Fast charging A generic term for various tech standards that make devices charge faster.

Field of view The amount of space measured in angles that can be seen from the camera lens.

Forked When developers take source code from software to make another program.

Freemium A business model where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

Full HD Resolution of 1920x1080 pixels.

GDPR General Data Protection Regulation. 2018 EU law strengthening people's privacy.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HEIC Apple's default image format for iOS.

HTML The language used to write most web pages.

HTTPS The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IMEI Integrated Mobile Equipment Identity. A unique number used to identify each mobile phone.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history.

IPS A screen technology that offers wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours.

ISBN International Standard Book Number. A 10- or 13-digit code used to identify books.

Jump list A menu showing recent files and tasks that appears when you right-click an app's icon on the Windows taskbar.

LCD Liquid-crystal display. The technology used to create almost all flatscreen monitors.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Liquid Retina Apple's term for its high-quality, edge-to-edge LCD screens with rounded corners, vibrant colours, and sharp resolution, used in devices like iPhones and iPads.

LLM Large language model. A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

Machine learning The science of teaching computers how to learn by themselves.

Manifest V2/V3 Second and third versions of the software that runs Chrome browser extensions.

Mesh Wi-Fi Wireless network system that uses connected routers to stretch Wi-Fi further.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

MP4 A type of digital movie file often used for portable players.

NAS A drive attached to a network that can be shared with other PCs.

Noise cancellation Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound to cancel the first.

Non-destructive editing Making changes to a file without permanently altering the original, allowing you to reverse or adjust edits later.

OCuLink Connectivity standard that allows high-speed data transfers between devices using PCI Express.

OEM Original Equipment Manufacturer. Refers to components or software installed by the manufacturer.

OLED A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in PC and TV screens.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

PAC Porting Authorisation Code. A unique code that lets users retain their mobile phone number when switching operators.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition.

PCIe A slot on the motherboard for expansion cards.

Plain text Text in a document that doesn't contain any formatting.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

PNG A format for images that shrinks file sizes without discarding data.

Proxy server A computer that sits between your PC and the internet and filters the connection.

.pub The file extension for Microsoft's Publisher software.

PWM Pulse-Width Modulation. A technique that controls power by rapidly switching a signal on and off.

QOI Quite OK Image Format. A fast, lossless image format that compresses and decompresses quicker than PNG.

QR code A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock files on your PC and demand a payment to release them.

RAR Roshal Archive. A format for storing compressed files.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

RGB Advanced type of LED backlighting that generates red, green and blue lights.

Scaling How operating systems display text from different programs to make it readable on screen.

Script A program stored on a web server to control part of a website.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

TAR Short for Tape Archive. A format for archiving files and directories.

Timestamp The time which an event is recorded by a computer.

TLS A technology for keeping information secure and secret when sent over the internet.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

Transition A way of joining two video clips together or moving from one clip to another.

TXT A basic file format that contains nothing but text.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

VESA Video Electronics Standards Association. A standard mount for attaching monitors on to stands, walls and PCs.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WebP Google's image format designed to create files that are smaller for the same quality, or of higher quality for the same size, than JPEG, PNG and GIF.

Whitelist A list of allowed websites, email addresses and programs used by security software.

Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows desktop.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Wi-Fi 7 Faster successor to Wi-Fi 6, with an estimated maximum speed of around 46Gbps.

Broadband Deals

	Provider	Package Name	Monthly Price	Contract Length	Broadband Speed	Reward*	First-year Cost*
1	vodafone	Full Fibre 80 City Fibre	**£23.00** £26.00 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	**80Mbps** avg. speed	**£90** Gift Card	CHEAPEST **£186.00**
2	BT	Fibre 2	**£25.99** £28.99 from 31st March 2026	24 Months	**74Mbps** avg. speed	**£50** Gift Card	**£261.88**
3	Virgin media	M250 Fibre Broadband	**£30.50** £34.00 from April 2026 bill	18 Months	**264Mbps** avg. speed	**£75** Bill Credit	**£291**
4	sky	Full Fibre 150	**£28.00** Prices locked until April 2027	24 Months	**150Mbps** avg. speed	**£45** Gift Card	**£291**

* First year cost inclusive of reward. Calculated based on 12 x monthly cost (includes price rise) – reward value.

*Reward subject to change. Available as of 25th March 2025.

GO. COMPARE

Easy when you

Know How

Hoping to eliminate Wi-Fi blackspots around his home, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Extend his Wi-Fi with an old phone

One thing I miss about my tiny, expensive flat in London was that I never had any problems connecting to Wi-Fi. Every corner was amply covered by the wireless signal, so I could work without leaving my bed during the winter months – just as well, as the place was freezing.

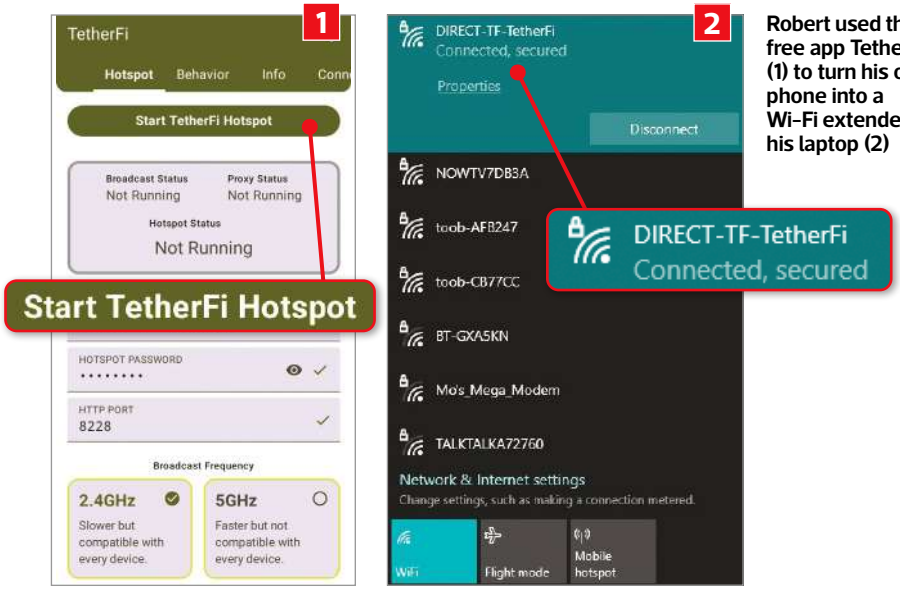
> A Wi-Fi extender with no Wi-Fi is about as useful as a chocolate teapot

Now I live in a larger, warmer and cheaper home outside the capital, I have fewer things to complain about – aside from late bin collections. But I have noticed that my Wi-Fi is spotty and sometimes non-existent in the areas furthest from my router.

I've considered buying a Wi-Fi repeater or mesh system to boost the signal to these blackspots, but first wanted to try a DIY approach. I'd read that you can use an old phone to extend your Wi-Fi coverage, to save forking out for a dedicated device.

To test this method, I dug out my old Motorola Moto G50 Android phone and connected it to my Wi-Fi network. Next, I opened the Settings app and chose 'Network & Internet' followed by 'Hotspot & tethering'. I then tapped 'Wi-Fi hotspot' and activated the option 'Use Wi-Fi hotspot'. The 'Hotspot password' was a random string of characters, so I changed it to something more memorable.

Back on my Windows laptop, I clicked the Wi-Fi icon in the system tray to view available networks. I selected my phone's hotspot and clicked Connect. This showed as 'Checking network requirements' then 'Connecting' before telling me it was 'Unable to connect'.



Robert used the free app TetherFi (1) to turn his old phone into a Wi-Fi extender for his laptop (2)

When I tried reconnecting, Windows prompted me to enter the hotspot password. I did so, clicked Connect and this time it worked – except it said 'No internet'. This was a major obstacle, because a Wi-Fi extender with no Wi-Fi is about as useful as a chocolate teapot.

On checking my phone, I found that enabling the hotspot had disconnected it from my Wi-Fi network. This apparently happens on devices that can't support both connections simultaneously. I searched for a setting in Android's 'Developer options' that reportedly fixes the problem, but this wasn't available on my Motorola phone.

Determined not to give up, I installed the free Android app TetherFi (www.snipca.com/54256). This sets up a hotspot on your phone using its active Wi-Fi (or mobile-data) connection. I tapped the Start TetherFi Hotspot button in the app (see screenshot 1) and granted it permission to access my precise location. I then connected to the hotspot on my laptop, by entering my router's PIN followed by the hotspot password. The connection was successful, but again it said 'No internet'.

To solve this problem, I configured Windows to use a proxy. I opened the Settings app and clicked 'Network & Internet', then Proxy. I switched on 'Use a proxy server' and entered the IP address and port number provided in the TetherFi app. I then clicked Save and tried connecting to the hotspot again. This did the trick (see screenshot 2) and I was finally able to get my laptop online via my old phone.

To test whether it actually did extend my Wi-Fi, I took my laptop to a corner where reception is weak, and placed the phone halfway between that blackspot and my router. Sure enough, the wireless signal now easily reached the problem area, though it wasn't particularly fast – 12.3Mbps, which is about a third of my usual download speed.

This is presumably because the hotspot and the proxy split the router's signal, significantly reducing the available bandwidth. But at least TetherFi managed to extend my wireless coverage, unlike my phone's own hotspot, and it didn't cost me a penny.

Need help extending your Wi-Fi signal? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to create better images in ChatGPT

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